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THE SUPERNATURAL IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY

Being a Critical Survey of Supernaturalism : Its Growth and Phases of Development in English Poetry during 1780-1830

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THE SUPERNATURAL IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY

1780-1830

BY

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY BHUPENDRALAL BANERJEE
AT THE CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS, SENATE HOUSE, CALCUTTA

Reg. No. 918B—January, 1938—x.

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Dedicated

To

My wife Savitri Dutt

In remembrance of Her loving encouragement
and unfailing helpfulness in carrying
through this arduous work

"Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also."

Robert Browning: *One Word More*

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THESIS APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,
MAY, 1934.

PREFACE

An attempt has been made in the following pages to bring into due relief and relation a special aspect of English romantic poetry, *viz.*, its supernaturalism. The growth of the distinctive character of the supernatural in romantic poetry has been sketched in the Introduction : its different modes and developments have been presented in the thesis in a few leading phases, interrelated through influences and formative ideas, though not exactly successive in order of time. As representing a turning point and a central phase, Wordsworth and Coleridge have been studied at greater length from the points of view of both their theories and their poetic practice. Of individual poets and poems dealing with supernatural themes during the romantic period, there is perhaps no paucity of critical treatment. But the need for a connected and systematic view still remains and the present work is intended to supply, however imperfectly, this need.

It will be found that, of some outstanding poets of the period like Scott, Wordsworth, Southey and Moore, each touches differently on the supernatural in the course of his poetical work. The difference, so far as the supernatural elements are concerned, between Scott's earlier poems like *Glenfinlas* and the *Eve of St. John* and his later romantic narratives beginning with the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, or

between Wordsworth's *White Doe of Rylstone* and *Peter Bell*, or between the romantic legendary poems of Southey, *Rudiger*, *Donica* and *Lord William* and the epics of *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama*, or, even within the same work, between Moore's *Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* and *Nourmahal*, yields its significance only when the poems are placed in relation to the different modes of supernaturalism. This has sometimes necessitated the relegation of the works of the same poet to separate heads. But as the present work does not propose exactly the study of individual romantic poets and their contributions to supernaturalism, this treatment, it is hoped, will result in no confusion of view.

Perhaps a brief word of explanation is called for regarding the chronological divisions. The half-century between 1780 and 1830, as delimited by Prof. Elton in his *Survey*, has been taken as covering the so-called romantic period. Within this period, the space of years during which a particular phase of supernaturalism may be said to have flourished or become dominant in romantic poetry has been sought to be indicated. But accuracy in such divisions of literary history is of course out of the question and there is bound to be a good deal of overlapping. They give, however, a rough and general idea of the order of development.

The survey is not claimed to be exhaustive and is by no means inclusive of all poems of supernatural theme or interest, even of outstanding merit, written during the romantic period. Specially one class of poems has been excluded from its scope as present-

ing no distinct phase of supernaturalism, and it is as well to notice it here. The mixed tragi-comic or serio-comic mode, spiced with the supernatural grotesque, is characteristic of much of the poetry of Hood and Praed. The effect of such poetry, however, depends scarcely on any sense or intuition of the supernatural, but rather on contrast of attitudes, odd juxtaposition of ideas, or the reaction of everyday reality on a conceived supernatural situation. Its ultimate literary filiation is perhaps to Burns's droll and burlesque dealings with superstition and folk-lore, but the immediate impulse came probably from such poems as Southey's *Old Woman of Berkeley*. The vein is worked out, outside the period delimited for the present work, by Bishop Barham in the *Ingoldsby Legends*. But this treatment of the supernatural is not really characteristic of romantic poetry at all and belongs rather to the sphere of humorous and satirical verse.

I have received no guidance in carrying through this work and have had to contend continually with the poverty of library facilities in Delhi. The checking of quotations and references has given me no end of trouble, and even now I am not altogether sure that all slips have been avoided. Apart from obligations of a more definite nature which are indicated in the footnotes, my general indebtedness to the critical works of scholars of eminence like Elton, Legouis, Herford, Bradley, Raleigh, Beers, Colvin, Garrod and DeSelincourt has been as wide and deep as it must necessarily be of every student of English romantic poetry. Without

their ' gladsome light,' it would perhaps have been impossible for a foreign student like myself to follow English romantic poetry with anything like enlightened understanding.

I am emboldened to publish this humble contribution to the critical literature on English romantic poetry by the fact that the work was scrutinized by three eminent authorities, *viz.*, Prof. Legouis of the Sorbonne, Dr. Oliver Elton and Dr. Garrod of Oxford, and recommended by them unanimously for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Calcutta.

Ramjas College,
DELHI (India):
December, 1937.

S. DUTT

Bibliographical Note

1. The *British Poets* referred to in the footnotes in Part I and elsewhere is the series of that name, complete in one hundred volumes, published in 1882 for J. Carpenter and others, proprietors of the edition. It is announced in the advertisement to the series: "To the works of authors contained in Sharpe's Collection are added those of some of our ancient poets and also of several of our modern; so that the series now extends from Chaucer and Spenser to Burns and Cowper."

2. The work referred to in the footnotes in Part II and elsewhere as the 'Edinburgh Edition' of Scott is the one-volume edition of *Scott's Poetical Works*, published with Scott's Prefaces, Introductions and Notes by Robert Cadell from Edinburgh in 1841.

3. The titles of and quotations from the ballads in Part II and Appendix II are taken from Child's *English and Scottish Ballads* (Student's Cambridge Edition) and in a few instances from Scott's *Minstrelsy*. The reprint of 'Historical and Romantic Ballads,' with Scott's original Introduction to the *Minstrelsy* and his notes on the ballads, edited by Alexander Murray and published by Ward, Locke and Co., London, in 1868, has been used, and the legendary poems of Leyden, Jamieson and Morritt have been consulted in this reprint.

4. The quotations in Appendix I from the poems of Burns are taken from *Burns's Poetical Works*, edited by Robertson and published from Oxford in 1896.

5. The 'Oxford Editions' of the poetical works of Wordsworth, Crabbe and Southey have been usually consulted, besides the one-volume edition of *Crabbe's Poetical Works*, edited by his son and published by John Murray, London, in 1847; the one-volume complete edition of *Southey's Poetical Works* published by Longmans, London,

in 1845; and DeSelincourt's definitive edition of *The Prelude*. For the poems of Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge's edition has been used and for his prose works, E. H. Coleridge's two volumes of the *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, *Anima Poetae*, Ashe's *Table Talk and Omniana* and other volumes, *Essays and Lectures* in Everyman's Library Series, and Shawcross's edition in two volumes of *Biographia Literaria*. For a passage in one of the letters of Coleridge (*vide* p. 168 footnote), I am indebted to Lowes's *Road to Xanadu*.

6. The footnotes will sufficiently indicate the sources, both textual and critical, on which I have drawn in the present work.

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INTRODUCTION

A century ago Heine interpreted the great aesthetic and literary movement, of which the Romantic School of Germany was an early outgrowth, as "the re-awakening of the poetry of the Middle Ages as it manifested itself in the poems, paintings and sculptures, in the art and life of those times."* Heine's interpretation has been followed up by later critics and historians of the Romantic Movement. But the conception of aesthetic and literary revivals is made somewhat dubious by our modern sense of evolutionary history which emphasises the fact that the state of intellectual and spiritual consciousness can never be identical in two ages. It would seem, therefore, to be inherently impossible for the aesthetic spirit to take a sudden leap across the dividing gulf of eighteenth-century rationalism and catch, at the turn of the next century, the wholly contrary temper and trend of the mediaeval mind. The 'indispensable eighteenth century' cannot be scrapped or isolated, nor can the long cultural distance between the Middle Ages and the modern be

* Die Romantische Schule (1833). See the *Prose Writings of Heinrich Heine*, ed. by Ellis, Scott Library, p. 70.

ignored. Thus, though one supposed line of filiation between mediaeval romance and modern romanticism may seem to lie in the re-awakened sensibility towards the supernatural, we feel a profound inward difference between the typically mediaeval and the modern romantic in both the conception and the expression of the supernatural. The clue to this difference must necessarily be sought in the intervening age of 'reason and common-sense.'

It is undoubtedly true that the dealings of the romantic poets with supernatural themes brought English poetry back into a long line of literary tradition, stretching backwards through centuries even to its rude Teutonic beginnings. From the broken-up pagan sagas, Old English Heroic poetry inherited a strain of old-world supernaturalism, with its monstrous shapes of Grendels, fire-drakes, giants and ogres, that appears in it so incongruously with the milder atmosphere of a new Christian world. The interest in the mediaeval lays and romances of strange adventures and outlandish things draws largely upon the old strain of marvel, refining it, however, out of the sturdy vital spirit of the heroic age. The old romance, through long traditional reiteration, seems to lose its pace and measure, become dusty and fatigued, slowing down, as we find it later, into a hum-drum which lends itself to Chaucer's satire already in the eighties of the fourteenth century. To the tale of Sir Thopas's 'faery' love-adventure, that leads to an encounter with the three-headed giant, the reaction of mine Host of the Tabard was

probably representative.* Yet this jaded traditional romance casts a dreamy kind of charm into the poetry of the English Renaissance and sheds a lingering influence on Elizabethan drama. When, however, supernaturalism re-emerges in English romantic poetry, it is no longer the old romance, but something essentially transmuted by a new artistic purpose and intent. The old literary tradition is resumed after an age of literary quiescence, but in a curiously devious and different line.

There was in fact no revival in English romantic poetry of what is called 'mediaeval supernaturalism,' and perhaps its revival, though wistfully desired by the late eighteenth-century admirers of the *Faerie Queene*, was impossible at that cultural distance from the Middle Ages. Spenser had lived before the age of science and rationalism came to mark off with sharp scientific distinction the realm of Nature from that of the supernatural, and he could re-conceive the themes of mediaeval romance in the peculiar spirit of the English Renaissance. But the sense that these themes were supernatural,—unrelated to modes of nature and human life,—would appear to be wholly alien to the imaginative impulse in which they had

* See the Prologue to the Tale of Meliboeus in the *Canterbury Tales* :

"Myn eres aken of thy drasty speche;
Now swiche a rym the devel I beteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel,' quod he."

The Tale of Sir Thopas, his intrusion into the 'country of Faery' and his repulse by Sir Oliphaunt, was, as is well known, a sly parody of the current verse-romances which were growing somewhat old-fashioned and obsolete at the time Chaucer wrote the inimitable parody.

originated. What differentiates fundamentally the old heroic or mediaeval romance from what we may call romantic supernaturalism is the complete absence from the former of any definite sensibility towards the supernatural as such. This sensibility was the outcome of a new romantic spirit approaching from a distant and wholly different angle of vision the wonders conceived by the mediaeval mind.

The primitive impulse to the conception of these wonders issued perhaps from that stage in the development of human mentality to which the name 'Naturism' has been given, when man's feeling with regard to his physical surroundings was 'of some mysterious intangible Nature-power.'* In the animistic conceptions of mythology we have a phase of the development of this feeling; a different and less definite phase appears perhaps in the marvels of old romance. The marvellous is not conceived, either in animistic myths or in heroic or mediaeval romance, as really supernatural at all, but rather as fanciful or imaginary extensions of the life and powers of Nature herself.

To the modern mind, the conception of Nature is somewhat rigidly limited by certain definite notions of law and regularity. These notions, however, had a long erratic course through a transi-

* See Yearsley's *The Folklore of Fairy Tale*, p. 4—"This condition is called Naturism, the root-idea of which is one of some vague, threatening power everywhere, inspiring a sense of indefinite but very real fear. At this period man had reached to no explanation of nature suggestive of anything personal in the way of spirits which were deliberately harmful to him. The world was not yet regarded as full of spirits, but as merely alive."

tional stage of culture-history which extends between the nascent sciences, like astrology and alchemy for instance, and their modern developments like astronomy and chemistry. In that inchoate period of culture when there was no close demarcation of the realm of Nature, and all science was ' in the condition of May-be,' as opposed to the ' Must-be of law,' imagination was under no intellectual inhibition in shaping out marvels about Nature and her works. Renan, a Celt himself, ' who has become conscious of his Celtic nature,' as F. W. Myers describes him,* has shown how the Celtic imagination conceived them in the Mabinogion as ' the extraordinary possibilities of Nature herself.' " Among the Cymry," says Renan, " the principle of the marvel is in nature herself, in her hidden forces, in her inexhaustible fecundity. There is a mysterious swan, a prophetic bird, a suddenly appearing hand, a giant, a black tyrant, a magic mist, a dragon, a cry that causes the hearer to die of terror, an object with extraordinary properties."† He brings out the distinctive character of this type of supernaturalism by comparison of it with ancient mythology and poetry on one hand and Catholic legends on the other. In the former, the supernatural arises out of animistic conceptions cast in anthropomorphic forms ; in the latter, it issues out of the conception of extra-mundane potencies of theistic and anti-theistic natures, the marvellous

* See *Essays Classical and Modern* (on Ernest Renan), p. 424.

† On *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* (see World's Great Classics, Vol. of Essays, Fr., Ger. and Ital. Essayists, p. 432).

being only a derogation from mundane laws. But the so-called supernatural of romance is but Nature in her strangest and most extraordinary aspects,—Nature being viewed in the unregulated pre-scientific outlook on her life and activities, unrestricted yet by experimental philosophy or the laws of science.

To this conception of what Renan calls 'the purely naturalistic marvellous,' the objective mode of presentment, characteristic of the treatment of the supernatural in romance, is peculiarly adapted. Its appeal lies directly to a type of mind in which scepticism has scarcely encroached on the idea of Nature's unknown potencies and possibilities. This type of mind perhaps flourished congenially in the secluded emotion-laden atmosphere of convents and monasteries and in the ignorant uncultured strata of feudal society. The Catholic legends had their simple marvels like the Devil appearing disguised as a temptress in Saint Dunstan's smithy, the saint's harp taking knowledge of his holy dreams and singing of itself, the wonder-voyage of Saint Brandan, the penal dance of the sabbath-breakers. They were presented to the mind for acceptance as holy truths, finding their justification not in any aesthetic satisfaction, but rather in the faith of those who regarded them as divine miracles. Similarly, the secular literature of balladry and minstrelsy found no hitch in dealing with the supernatural as mere 'silly sooth.' The effect of bare unemotional recitals of wonders was not marred mentally by the habit of sceptical questioning. The ballads tell of birds carrying messages for lovers or dying men, the secret of the maiden's death revealed by a harp

made out of her dead body, the ghosts of drowned children come back home to take their last farewell of the sorrowing mother and ' the dead coming to the quick ' for fulfilment of a plighted troth.

Even in a typical mediaeval production, intended obviously for a more cultured audience, like the episodical Arthurian romance of Chrestien de Troyes, the supernatural incidents have the same character and direction. In both, what the poet calls, the *matière* and the *san* (the matter and the treatment), his vision of the supernatural is perfectly objective and unblinking. In dealing with the marvellous he seems to lay all the cards on the table, nothing being held back for mystery or sophisticated for the sake of allegory. Through the adventures of the errant knights, the mind of the reader is hitched on from wonder to wonder of the type now banished into the make-believe world of children,—the spring that boils though the water be colder than marble, the magic ring that makes the wearer invisible, the spell-girt garden that holds a secret.* There are no doubt many refreshing varieties of marvel in mediaeval romance.† But, mixed with survivals from an earlier stratum

* See *Arthurian Romances by Troyes* (Everyman's Library)—" Thou shalt see the spring which boils, though the water is colder than marble "—p. 185. " He who wears the ring upon his finger need no concern for anything; for no one, however sharp his eyes may be, will be able to see him any more than the wood which is covered by the outside bark "—p. 193. See also pp. 70 ff. where the adventure connected with the Joy of the Court is described."

† Prof. Oliver Elton draws attention to some of them, appearing in Middle English romances, in his latest work, *The English Muse* (1933), pp. 47-48.

of romance,—the fabulous human and sub-human creatures of the heroic epoch,—the main stock-in-trade consists of wonders too realistic or too bare of mystery alienating them from reality, to be interpreted as fantasy or dream, and at the same time too remote from our sense of life's possibilities to be explicable as idealised or imaginative versions of any phase of life at all.

It is obvious that with the growth of scepticism and rationalism, this mode of representing the supernatural must lose its sustaining basis. In the more courtly literature of romance, traces of sophistication, scarcely apparent in the legendary or in minstrelsy and balladry, become all too evident. A crude art of make-believe seems to appear for the first time in the dream-motive and the spiritual allegory. The intrusion of the critical spirit is warned off the field, as it were, by saying beforehand that such things never really happened, or that they were no real things but shadows and symbols of abstract truths. It is well exemplified by Tasso's attempt to explain away the spells and illusions of the Enchanted Forest as ' shadowing out the false reasoning into which our passions are apt to mislead us.' Meant originally perhaps to reconcile the supernatural to minds that had outgrown objective faith in it, the allegory lapsed from its original purpose into a standing literary convention.

In the dramatist's art, a more intimate interference of scepticism with the representation of the supernatural is to be observed during the Renaissance and after. Shakespeare makes a somewhat significant reference to contemporary sceptics in a

passage in *All's Well that Ends Well,** and the rationalistic bias in the more cultured minds of his time peeps out in his plays in unexpected places with or without dramatic purpose or significance.† The curiously mixed character of the supernatural machinery of Elizabethan drama is perhaps significant. In its masterpieces where it is employed, a subtler, a more symbolical treatment appears along with much that is gross and mediaeval. Thus in the pact with the Devil in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*,—a hackneyed mediaeval motive that appears elsewhere too in Elizabethan drama, as in the anonymous play of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, —the dramatic appeal is referred not simply to superstitious sympathy, but to an implicit psychological interest. The symbolical element in the treatment of witchcraft in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is unmistakable : it comes out in relief through contrast with the grossness of the representation in

* " They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless "—II, 3, 1-3. Mr. Clark suggests that when Shakespeare came to London and mixed with men of advanced thought, ' he dropped many of his old ideas and ranged himself with the philosophers and scientists.' (*Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, p. 43). He also points out that Shakespeare uses two kinds of ghosts in his dramas, the objective and the subjective (*ibid*, p. 77), and that ' the *Hamlet* Ghost itself becomes subjective on its appearance in Gertrude's closet ' (*ibid*, p. 79).

† *E.g.*,—" I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable."—*Othello*, V, 2, 285-286.

" The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings."
—*Julius Caesar*, I, 2, 140-141.

Compare Milton on the fairies seen by a belated peasant :

" Or dreams he sees; "—*Paradise Lost*, I, 784.

Middleton's chaotic play of the *Witch* with which Shakespeare's drama got somehow complicated.

Perhaps the artistic instinct of Shakespeare was infallible in this respect too, and the subtly flexible treatment of the supernatural in his mature masterpieces like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* was calculated to meet all possible intellectual attitudes towards it. The 'platform ghost' in *Hamlet*, an ancient literary inheritance from Aeschylus through Seneca, is differentiated in nature from the 'closet ghost,' and the apparition of murdered Banquo in *Macbeth* from the visible and palpable supernatural agents of the action. As a practical playwright, the poet had constantly to strike the balance between the necessity of making concessions to popular superstition and the desire of meeting intellectual scepticism. The substance of the supernatural in Elizabethan drama, however, is decidedly mediaeval, although in the attitude towards it a significant difference is made by the influence of Renaissance scepticism.*

The importance of the age that intervenes between the end of Elizabethan drama and the first beginnings of romantic poetry is crucial in the culture-history of England from one point of view. It saw the final transition, roughly described as that from mediaeval mentality to modern, which replaced one interpretative view of life by a radically different one.

* For the spirit of scepticism in the age of the Renaissance, which found its most influential exponents in Montaigne and Scarron, see Lecky's *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, Ch. I.

Intellectually the most operative factor in this transition was the far-reaching effect of Baconian philosophy, carried on from Bacon through Hobbes and Locke and from Locke to Bolingbroke and Hume. The philosophy of Bacon was directed to " the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things," which the mythical philosophers of his *New Atlantis* made their aim and object. And it dug at the very roots of that sense of mystery in the operations of Nature which had shaped ' the naturalistic marvellous ' of mediaeval romance. In the allegory of ' Solomon's House or the College of the Six Days' Works,' there was an unconscious prophecy of the foundation of the Royal Society. The Society started, as Cowley tells us in his *Ode*, under the aegis of the great name of Bacon,* and we may observe in the tone of Butler's satire on its initial efforts how the quest for laws and explanations of natural phenomena shook the old, lingering, mediaeval mystery-sense about Nature.†

* " The orchard's open now and free,
Bacon has broke the scare-crow deity. (*i.e.*, Authority)
Come, enter, all that will,
Behold the ripen'd fruit, come gather now your fill."
—*Ode To the Royal Society.*

† " The bravest soldiers scorn, until they're got
Close to the enemy, to make a shot;
Yet great philosophers delight to stretch
Their talents most at things beyond their reach,
And proudly think t'unriddle ev'ry cause,
That Nature uses, by their own bye-laws:
When 'tis not only impertinent, but rude,
Where she denies admission, t' intrude;"
—*Satire upon the Imperfection and Abuse of Human Learning.*

109.179

Hobbes was Bacon's intellectual successor and the concluding chapter of his *Leviathan* is devoted to an exposition and refutation of fanciful or superstitious notions of demonology, etc., which are contrary to 'true philosophy.'* "By Philosophy is understood," says Hobbes the Baconian, "the knowledge acquired by Reasoning, from the Manner of the Generation of anything, to the Properties; or from the Properties, to some possible Way of Generation of the same, to the end to be able to produce, so far as matter and human force permit, such Effects, as human life requireth."† Speaking of Hobbes in the early years of the eighteenth century, Sheffield says:

> "While in dark ignorance we lay afraid
> Of Fancies, Ghosts and Empty Shades,
> Great Hobbes appear'd and by plain Reason's light
> Put such fantastic shapes to shameful flight."‡
>
> (*On Mr. Hobbes and his Writings*)

The rationalistic tendency is carried on and worked out by the scientific movements of the post-

* See Chapter XLVI (Of Darknesse from Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions).

† *Leviathan* (Everyman's Library), p. 363.

‡ Sheffield's lines have reference to the following passage in Ch. 44 of *Leviathan*:

"The Enemy has been here in the Night of our naturall Ignorance, and sown the tares of spirituall Errors; and that, First, by abusing, and putting out the light of the Scriptures: For we erre, not knowing the Scriptures. Secondly, by introducing the Daemonology of the Heathen Poets, that is to say, their fabulous Doctrine concerning Daemons, which are but Idols, or Phantasms of the braine, without any reall nature of their own, distinct from human fancy; such as are dead mens Ghosts, and Fairies, and other matter of old Wives Tales. Etc."—*Leviathan* (Everyman's Library), p. 332.

Restoration period as well as by the philosophical and theological thinking of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The credit for the purging of superstition was a bone of contention, as the interesting Collins-Bentley controversy shows, between the Philosophers and the Scientists. "The Devil," said Collins, "is entirely banished the United Provinces where free-thinking is in the greatest perfection, whereas all round about that Commonwealth, he appears in various shapes, sometimes in the shape of an old black gentleman, sometimes in that of a dead man, sometimes in that of a cat." To this Bentley replied that "the honour of routing the Devil belongs not to the sect of the free-thinkers, but to the Royal Society, the Boyles and Newtons."* The Devil, who figures solemnly in this learned controversy, will be readily recognised as none other than the homelier 'De'il' of Burns whose supposed pranks and exploits furnish the themes of vulgar superstition.† The poets of the age were stimulated to a number of odes, lyrics and Spenserian allegories by the idea of the decisive triumph of Reason over Superstition and paid their due homage to scientists and philosophers.‡

* See Leslie Stephen's *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. I, p. 206. Collins's *Discourse of Free Thinking* was published in 1713.

† See Appendix I of the present work.

‡ We may cite as examples Joseph Warton's Ode *To Superstition*, Akenside's *Hymn to Science*, Lady Winchelsea's *Moral Song*, Denton's *House of Superstition* which is an elaborate Spenserian allegory. For the homage paid by poets to philosophers and scientists, see Pope's *Epitaph* intended for Sir Isaac Newton, and the passage on that eminent scientist in the Second Epistle of the *Essay on Man*,

Bacon was looked upon in the eighteenth century as the destroyer of the superstitious view of Nature which had held the mediaeval mind in thrall. Yet the weapon of destruction that he wielded was the simple idea of Law. The whole imposing superstructure of his philosophy was built on the Renaissance conception of Law, which is expounded and amplified from the deistic point of view by Hooker in the First Book of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. "All things that are," says Hooker, "have some operation not violent or casual;.....that which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure of working, the same we term a law. So that no certain end could ever be attained unless the action whereby it is attained were regular.....that is to say, made suitable, fit and correspondent unto their end by some canon, rule or law, which thing doth first take place in the works even of God himself." To this, Bacon only superadded the idea that the processes of these laws were knowable, through all their ramifications by the human intellect under certain conditions and by certain methods. The whole of Baconian philosophy was virtually an exposition and amplification of these conditions and these methods.

The experimental philosophy, as it was called, which flourished during the latter half of the seventeenth century, seems to have proceeded on a double

Thomson's elegy on *Sir Isaac Newton*, Robert, Earl Nugent's *Ode to William Pulteney* in which Hooker and Locke are glorified, and Sheffield Earl of Mulgrave's poem *On Mr. Hobbes and his Writings*.

postulate, *viz.*, that the order of the universe is continuous and inviolate and that the chain-work of cause and effect binding this order together is traceable by the human intellect. That philosophy applied itself to the physical phenomena of Nature, and the great scientists of the period, Boyle, Halley, Wallis, Sydenham, Woodward, Grew, Newton and others, were busy reducing the presumed regularity of Nature's operations to mathematical laws. The use of the word, Law, in this scientific sense, as we learn from the New English Dictionary, dates from the first volume of the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* published in 1665. The scientific notion of law, first established in the realm of physical Nature through the Royal Society's activities, which seem from the very start to have exercised a curious fascination over the poetic minds of the period, Cowley and others, was soon projected by philosophers like Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Locke and Hume into the realm of the mind and the spirit. The intellectual outlook of the age was determined by a belief in the existence of regulating laws everywhere, and speculative thought dominated by the idea of a formal system subsisting all material, mental and even spiritual phenomena.* Pope's conception of

"Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged and universal light;"
(*Essay on Criticism*)

* Leslie Stephen says—"In religion or morality, and in politics, the thought of the age recognised a system of abstract rules, mathematically precise and coherent, which, as regarded from various as-

gives to the idea of universal and inviolate system an imaginative embodiment.

Pope's poetic conception of Nature harks back to Shaftesbury's 'philosophical rhapsody' on Nature in *The Moralists*, where Theocles reveals to Philocles the Spirit of Nature which is all harmony.* The speculations of philosophers, of Bolingbroke and others, are full of reverberations of Shaftesbury's philosophy, and these abstract speculations filter down into poetry, in Pope's *Essay on Man* and later in Brooke's *Universal Beauty* in which God is apostrophised with unconscious humour as the 'Supreme Geometrician.'!† Poetry thus seems to have caught from 'the countenance of science' not its 'impassioned,' but its sober rational expression, to the sorrow and regret of the romantically minded critics of the age like Joseph Warton who succinctly comments on the loss suffered by poetry on account of "that philosophical, that geometrical and systematical spirit so much in vogue, which spread itself from the sciences into polite literature."‡

The literary consciousness of the eighteenth century, impregnated by the scientific spirit, found a

pects, gave rise to conceptions of the religion of nature, the laws of nature, the social contract and other allied hypotheses. A similar code was supposed to exist in the sphere of imagination." (*English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. II, p. 353).

* See Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, ed. by Robertson, Vol. II, p. 294. Also pp. 45-46.

† The theme of Brooke's poem is the eulogy of world-order and the proper rule of human conduct that follows from it, *viz.*, to abandon the artificial and be guided by the natural.

‡ See Joseph Warton's Edition of the Works of Pope, Vol. I, p. 322.

fixed centre in the conception of Nature delimited by laws. It relapsed inevitably into an attitude of contrariety or conflict to those lawless visions and representations of Nature in fable or romance, the type of which is in the *Arabian Nights*, as Prof. Dowden picturesquely describes it: "Whether a date-stone will produce a date or will summon up a gigantic 'Efreet, whether a fish upon the frying pan will submit to be fried, or will lift up his head from the pan and address his cook, is entirely beyond the possibility of prediction. Nature is a kind of Alhambra, 'a brilliant dream, a caprice of the genii, who have made their sport with the net-work of stone,' with the fantastic arabesques, the fringes, the flying lines.'"* In the illustrations taken in the above passage, we have the simple and primitive type of Nature-marvels. The type is reproduced in more complex and prolific variety, and in the more dignified setting of chivalric incidents and sentiments, in the mediaeval tales of romance.

In the aesthetic appreciation of these Nature-marvels, a difficulty was bound to arise after science had dissociated Nature from marvels, and it is sought to be solved in the aesthetics of our time by the separation of the intuitional world from the intellectual. Crabbe describes this difficulty in approaching 'the worthies of romance.' After reviewing the magic wonders narrated by them, the poet exclaims in ecstasy:

"Ah! happy he who, thus in magic themes,
O'er worlds bewitch'd, in early rapture dreams

* *Studies in Literature* (The Scientific Movement and Literature), p. 98.

Where wild Enchantment waves her potent wand,
And Fancy's beauties fill her fairy land;
Where doubtful objects strange desires excite,
And Fear and Ignorance afford delight."

The inevitable growth of the mature rational mind debars the poet from this 'high-fantastical' happiness, and he quits the land of romance with a lingering farewell, intriguing in its mixture of romantic regret and rationalistic content:

"But lost, forever lost, to me these joys,
Which Reason scatters, and which Time destroys;
.....
.....
My doughty giants all are slain or fled,
And all my knights, blue, green, and yellow, dead!
No more the midnight fairy tribe I view,
All in the merry moonshine tippling dew;
E'en the last lingering fiction of the brain,
The churchyard ghost, is now at rest again;
And all these wayward wanderings of my youth
Fly Reason's power and shun the light of Truth."

So the problem presents itself to the poet's mind:

"Is it then right to dream that Syrens sing?
Or mount enraptured on the Dragon's wing?"
(*The Library*)

The question, which provokes by the quaint ambiguity lurking in the word 'right,' fundamental considerations about the purpose and function of the poet's art, is, however, answered off-hand in the

negative, and the happiness of such delusion is relegated to the privilege of infancy.

The intellectual difficulty, of which Crabbe is perhaps but a representative spokesman, was pressed further into the sphere of aesthetics and poetics. The theory that all fine arts, including the art of poetry, were an imitation of Nature, owing its origin to a mistaken interpretation of Aristotelean *mimesis*, had come down to the eighteenth-century poets and critics strained through the exegetic vagaries of the so-called Classical and Neo-Classic Schools. It had persisted indeed in literary criticism since the Renaissance, but had never been used as a ban on the treatment of the supernatural in Renaissance poetry or Elizabethan drama. The eighteenth century, however, had a fresh conception of Nature. It was canvassed in the sphere of literary creation no less eagerly and importunately than that other conception, arrived at through a new sense of history, of Nature as something primitive or past and standing behind the modern man, was canvassed from Rousseau downwards in the romantic age.

In the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope, who may be taken as the central exponent of the critical mind of his epoch, enjoins the poet to follow Nature. If we can get at his real meaning through all the incrustations of neo-classic convention overlaying his critical thinking, we shall probably discover that by following Nature, Pope means something more than Horace and Boileau. He interprets imitation of Nature as signifying not merely that the rules of poetic art should adhere to consistency and common

sense, but that they must further find in the exemplars of Nature their sanction and justification.* Pope's Nature was of course of eighteenth-century conception,—which never errs from laws and manifests itself in normality. In Pope's interpretation, the ancient theory of Nature-imitation seems thus to reduce itself to the doctrine that the ideal

* The critical position taken by Pope in the *Essay on Criticism* seems to me to differ materially from that of Boileau in *Art Poetique*, specially in the conception of the relation between Nature and Art. Nature to Pope is not the mere object of imitation by Art,—its relation to Art is far more close and intimate. As Nature imparts 'life, force and beauty to all,' so it is 'at once the source, and end and test of art.' The rules are sought to be drawn, not as Boileau seeks to draw them, from Sense and Reason, but from Nature herself. While Boileau is, as Prof. Saintsbury calls him, 'the solifidian of sense,' Pope is the solifidian of Nature. Even the cardinal Horatian-Boileauesque rule of the subordination and proportioning of the parts to the total artistic effect is based by Pope not on Reason or Common sense, but on the example of Nature :

"In wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
Is not the exactness of peculiar parts;" *et seq.*

Even deviation from rules is justified because in Nature there are deviations from order:

"In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,
Which out of nature's common order rise,
The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice."

More significant perhaps is Pope's defence of Homer. Pope, following the well-worn authority of Vida, identifies Homer with Nature. Now Horace suggests in *Ars Poetica* that even 'good, old Homer sometimes nods.' But in the scientific eighteenth-century view, there could be no aberrations in Nature, and, if Homer and Nature were identified, there could be none in Homer too. So Pope refutes Horace on the analogy of Nature. In Nature some figures appear monstrous and misshaped:

"Which, but proportion'd to their light or place,
Due distance reconciles to form and grace."

As in Nature, so in Homer:—"Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream."

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world created by art must have a recognisable semblance to the regulated world of Nature. Anything passing beyond this semblance would not be an artistic creation, but merely a product of the ' romantic spirit,' that is, the spirit of caprice and vagary as opposed to the restraint and rule of art.

The resumption of the supernatural in later poetry was preluded by veiled or open attacks on this critical theory which sought to confine within the lines of so-called ' probability ' the ideal world of creative art. Burke, in his approach to a fresh critical method based on the distinctions of psychology, had already cast a passing doubt on the theory.* But to the conventional school, the romantic and the improbable were synonymous and under taboo in the province of art. The curious phenomenon, known as legal fiction in the history of law, seems, however, to have its counterpart in the history of literary criticism. Old theories acquire all the sanctity of tradition and are allowed to retain their dominant places. But their substance and significance are vacated by new interpretations, necessitated by fresh literary phenomena claiming critical notice and demanding reconcilement to the old theories. This process overtook the theory of the imitation of Nature by Art, and we may trace it in Hurd's Letter X *On Chivalry and Romance*, Coleridge's *Essay on Poesy or Art*, even in the metaphysical theorisings of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Fundamental questions like ' What is Nature?' and

* See Burke's *Treatise on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Bohn's Select Library), p. 129.

'What is imitation?' were provoked by the romantic interpreters of the classical theory, and their speculations on such questions, whatever their intrinsic value, served definitely to lift the ban on the use of the improbable or supernatural in poetry. Such critical speculations, however, are always of *ex post facto* character: they are prompted by new aesthetic perceptions, and their real inward significance lies in the fact that they indicate a change of direction of literary consciousness.

But behind the eighteenth-century antagonism to romance, which was conditioned, as we have seen, by the evolution of a new conception of Nature, the infusion of the scientific spirit into creative literature, the critical theories and aesthetics of the age, there were forces that culture could not possibly reach, *viz.*, the intuitive sympathies and antipathies of the mind. They produced mental tendencies and inclinations curiously at odds with the manifest approvals or disapprovals of culture. Detached and fitful expressions of these tendencies, so striking in the context of convention and tradition, have been ransacked by scholars exploring the origins of the English romantic movement. Their researches have brought the fact into relief that the obsolescence of the old romancer's art did not result in the wearing out of interest in the materials themselves. The *Faerie Queene* and the Arthurian legends suffered no deliberate eschewal: they retained on the other hand, throughout the age of reason, a fascination quite at variance with its dominant temper, and Prof. Raleigh has drawn attention to the popularity and esteem in the age of Pope of a

work like Caxton's prose version of the mediaeval Troy legend.* In a period, so professedly and ostentatiously unromantic, this paradoxical inclination towards romance is, however, a perfectly intelligible phenomenon, and in its train came later, with the lifting of the mists of false aesthetic theories about 'naturalness' or 'probability,' a clearer vision of the world of medieval supernaturalism. It lay embodied to romantic minds in Spenser's poetry,† which for the best part of the eighteenth century had been misread and misconstrued as a vehicle of morality, interesting by reason only of its moral allegory.‡

In the epic substance of the *Faerie Queene*, there is in fact a sort of literary foreshortening of the romantic Middle Ages. The poem, as is well

* See Lecture on *Romance* (Princeton University Press), pp. 45-46.

† Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance was published in 1752. It would appear that even at that time there was a school of admirers of the romantic elements in Spenser. Speaking of the revolution of literary taste in the eighteenth century, Hurd laments the loss of 'a world of fine fabling.' He adds, however, that "the illusion of it is so grateful to the charmed spirit that, in spite of philosophy and fashion, Faery Spenser still ranks highest among the Poets; I mean with all those who are either come of that house, or have any kindness for it." (Morley's Ed., pp. 154-155). The word 'kindness' is used by Hurd in the old sense of congeniality. He means those who are romantic by temperament or are romantically inclined.

‡ See Prof. Phelps's *Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, pp. 54-55, 81, etc. The first eighteenth-century edition of Spenser was published in 1715 by John Hughes. He prefixed to it an Essay on Allegorical Poetry and also some Remarks on the *Faerie Queene*. According to Hughes, "it ought rather to be considered as a poem of a particular kind, describing.....most noted virtues and vices." He adds apologetically: "It ought to be considered, too, at the time when our author wrote, the remains of the old Gothic chivalry were not quite abolished." See also Doctor Johnson's criticism quoted at p. 81 of Phelps's book.

known, was an ample poetical lens that focussed to an age, keenly delighting in the pageantry of beauty and power, all the shooting lights of the mediaeval literary mind,—its strangely misshapen reminiscences of the antique world, marvels of Italian chivalric romance, all the voluminous 'matter of Britain, France and Rome.' To young Addison in 1694, Spenser had appeared to be an antiquated poet who 'in ancient tales amused a barbarous age,'—

> "An age that yet uncultivate and rude,
> Where'er the poet's fancy led, pursu'd;"
> (*Account of the Greatest English Poets*)

—with crude incredible marvels that 'could deceive an understanding age no more.' A more 'understanding' age, however, succeeded in which Wordsworth voiced his feeling for Spenser's poetry in the following exquisite lines :

> "Notes could we hear as of a faery shell
> Attuned to words with sacred wisdom fraught;
> Free Fancy prized each specious miracle,
> And all its finer inspiration caught."
> (*The White Doe of Rylstone—Dedication*)

At one extreme, we have Addison's critical fallacy to which Croce would give the name of 'historicism'* and at the other, Wordsworth's 'free Fancy' prizing each specious miracle of Spenser. Between these two extremes, the appreciation of Spenser goes through a rising scale of aesthetic

* See Croce's *Aesthetic* (trans. by Ainslie), I, iv, pp. 32 ff.

value. The *Faerie Queene* became indeed the centre of the critical heart-searchings and aesthetic yearnings of the romantic spirits of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The appreciation of Spenser in the eighteenth century is a matter of somewhat peculiar import. It is prompted by no critical perception of any special quality in Spenser's supernaturalism. It is involved rather in a wider feeling,—in the sense of the marvellous and the intuitive quest for it below the top-dressing of a rationalistic culture. Spenser is but the showman of a world which attracts by its otherness,—the supernatural world as opposed to what appeared familarly in life and literature, the world of nature and normality.

To Hurd and others, he is emphatically 'Faery Spenser,' and they long to restore to modern vision the vanished world he represents. Joseph Warton, one of those on whom Faery Spenser already established his sway, laments passionately, even in the midst of his labours of editing 'the great poet of Reason,' as he calls Pope, that "the Forests of Fairyland have been rooted up and destroyed; the castles and the palaces of Fancy are in ruins; the magic wand of Prospero is broken and buried many fathoms deep in the earth."* Joseph Warton's worthy pupil Russell, the young poet and critic whose place in the ancestral line of the later-coming romantics is recognised by Southey in the *Vision of Judg-*

* The passage occurs in Warton's Life of Alexander Pope prefixed to Pope's works edited by him. See Warton's edition of Pope's Works, Vol. I, p. xi.

*ment,** blames Cervantes, 'the favourite child of Reason,' for tearing with a ruthless hand 'the mystic veil by genius weaved of yore.' He catalogues with loving admiration all the wonders Romantic Fancy delights in,—'the drear desert and enchanting dome,' 'the perils of adventurous knights,' and all the endless paraphernalia of mediaeval romance: its giants, dragons, painims and warrior-maids; its herbs, talismans, crystal globes, amber streams and fragrant isles; its wailing ghosts, demon-guarded walls and labouring fiends; warning voices from graves, twilight pageants, viewless harps, goblin-built bridges, winged steeds and magic barks.† It is obviously a sensibility only,—a mere feeling for the supernatural and the marvellous as such,—that utters itself through the eighteenth-century appreciation of Spenser and the mediaeval supernatural.

The evolution of supernaturalism from a mere sensibility of the mind to a purely aesthetic and literary motive in romantic poetry cannot be rightly understood until we scrutinise the composite character of this sensibility of which the pre-romantics give such ample evidence. In the first place, it is closely connected with the eighteenth-century tradition itself by way of reaction and revolt; in the second place, it is a projection into the cultural plane of the mind of

* Russell is mentioned by Southey among the Young Spirits of the Georgian Era whom "the Muses marked for themselves at birth, and with dews from Castilia sprinkled."

† See Russell's poem *To Cervantes* (*British Poets*, Vol. LXXIII. pp. 153-154).

our vital instincts and intuitions, something quite apart from any purely and positively aesthetic feeling like the 'free Fancy' with which Wordsworth approached Spenserian romance. The eighteenth-century sensibility towards the supernatural, as we shall presently observe, has nothing of the cultured direction or detached temper essential for artistic creativeness.

We know that even Pope was caught in the romantic lure in the very citadel of rationalism. It is betrayed by his confession to Mrs. Cowper in epistolary confidence of a long-cherished 'inclination to tell a fairy tale, the more wild and exotic the better,' with 'a vision that is confined to no rules of probability,' and his appreciation of the so-called Persian Tales and the pseudo-Chaucerian poem, paraphrased by Dryden in verse, *The Flower and the Leaf*.* All this turning to the romantic and the supernatural on the part of Pope and other poets of his school was mostly a reactionary movement of the mind against the over-emphasis on the natural and normal in literature and the philosophy of life. Perhaps it is the sophisticated and refined expression of the secret attraction, felt in an age of tyranny of Reason, for all that appealed to the extra-rational parts of the mind,—superstition, folk-lore, or, for cultured literary minds, the finer-woven marvels of romance. The attitude is well represented by Bowles in one of his poems, in

* Prof. Phelps draws attention to this letter in the *Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, p. 25. The letter will be found in Pope's works edited by Warton, Vol. IX, p. 431. There are certain elements in *The Flower and the Leaf* to which the poet of *The Rape of the Lock* would undoubtedly feel attracted.

which, standing face to face with a hoary mediaeval castle, the poet recalls the various modes of life and successive ages that have passed by within its time-worn battlements. Refinement wakes at last, dispersing 'the fumes of feudal darkness' with science, culture, Athenian taste and milder manners. Then the poet proceeds :

" Such is thy boast, Refinement. But deep dyes
Oft mar the splendour of thy moontide skies: "

Fancy, sick of the follies, fopperies, sophistries, insincere sentimentalities and licentious sallies of an artificial age :

" Would fain the shade of elder days recall,
The Gothic battlements, the bannered hall,
Or list of elfin harps the fabling rhyme,
Or wrapped in melancholy trance sublime,
Pause o'er the working of some wond'rous tale,
Or bid the spectres of the castle hail! "

(*St. Michael's Mount*)

Even a cursory glance at a few characteristic expressions of the feeling for romance in the eighteenth century reveals at once its curiously extrinsic non-literary complications. When Doctor Johnson remarks that the 'old romances are not so improbable as they appear,' he implies something more than a mere literary judgment or denial of Horace's 'incredulus odi.' It is open to question whether Johnson's well-known appreciation of romance is purely a matter of aesthetic feeling or it has some secret entanglements with his curi-

ously compounded mentality which Boswell with 'inside information' has not failed to comment on.* When Collins urges Home to deal in poetry with the supernatural folk-lore and legends of the Scottish countryside, saying:

"Let thy sweet Muse the rural faith sustain,"

and citing the authority of Tasso:

".....whose undoubting mind
Believed the magic wonders which he sung!"
(*Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands*)

he evidently wants back again the old simple faith in the supernatural to instil into English poetry a breath of the old-world fabling. Supernatural themes of the character, suggested to Home by Collins, were dealt with later by Burns, though in a spirit and temper opposite to that intended by Collins, in a few of his poems conceived in a half-jocular and half-serious vein.† But in Burns's treatment, superstitions appear as superstitions, and they are not viewed through any transforming medium of artistic feeling. Burns's own statement of his mental attitude in the well-known autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore forms a significant commentary on his literary motive in dealing with them. "In my infant and boyish days," says Burns, "I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family.....She had, I suppose, the

*"He was prone to superstition, but not to credulity. Though his imagination might incline him to a belief of the marvellous and the mysterious, his vigorous reason examined the evidence with jealousy"—*Life of Johnson* (Globe Ed.), p. 690.

† See Appendix I for a review of Burns's supernatural poems.

CALCUTTA CENTRAL

largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, contraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out on suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors.''* The catalogue is intriguing: matters from old romances and living superstitions are jumbled up in a mass, and this large supernatural stuff is conveyed by a tradition of a social uncultural character. The passage lets us into the secret of what has sometimes been called 'the romantic tradition in the eighteenth century.' † The imaginative value or significance of romantic and supernatural tales was scarcely realised or felt, but their affinity to the child's uninstructed intuitions was recognised by supplying romance to children, orally or in reading, in unstinted measure.

The interest felt by the pre-romantics in the mediaeval supernatural was in keeping with this peculiar eighteenth-century temper about romance and supernaturalism. As the appreciation of them was supposed to demand a certain mental condition un-

* Lockhart's *Life of Burns* (Everyman's Library), pp. 264-265.

† *E.g.*, G. H. Mair's *Modern English Literature* (1914): ,' There was a strong romantic tradition in the eighteenth century, though it does not give its character to the writing of the time.''—p. 208.

hampered by cultural habitude, so their reproduction was believed to call for a reversion to the old romancer's mental outlook. The mingled note of regret and failing uttered by Hurd,* Joseph Warton, Russell and others yields its real meaning when we consider that, between those of the earlier period of the century who had set their faces against what was picturesquely described as ' the fairy way of writing ' or baldly named ' the marvellous species of writing '† and those of the later period who were smitten with its charm and fascination, there was a large common ground. It was the idea, however fallacious, that the decline of superstition must involve a corresponding decline of supernaturalism in literature. The regret is poignantly expressed by the latter that scepticism and rationalism should make such havoc of the supernatural in poetry.

Collins's *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands*, which will be noticed later, is the first definite articulation in the century of the longing for the recall of the supernatural note into English poetry. The poet invokes in favour of his argument the authority of Tasso and Shakespeare, but feels at the same time that the source of power of these older poets is no longer available to his age. He connects the

* " One thing is true, that the success of these fictions will not be great, when they have no longer any footing in the popular belief. And the reason is, that readers do not usually do, as they ought, put themselves in the circumstances of the poet, or rather of those of whom the poet writes."—*Letters*, Morley's ed., p. 143.

† ' The fairy way of writing'—*The Spectator*, No. 419; ' The Marvellous Species of writing '—*Tom Jones*, Bk. VIII, Ch. I.

strength and enchantment of Tasso's poetic art with the supposed strength of his faith in the supernatural :

" Prevailing poet! whose undoubting mind
Believed the magic wonders which he sung!
Hence at each sound, imagination glows;
Hence, at each picture, vivid life starts here!
Hence his warm lay with softest sweetness flows;
Melting it flows, pure, numerous, strong and clear,
And fills the impassioned heart, and wins the harmonious ear ! "

But for those poets who did not believe in these ' magic wonders ' and had not the ' undoubting mind ' of Tasso, whence was to come the power and inspiration of the enchanting Italian poet?

What had appeared to be only a fascinating lost cause in poetry to the pre-romantics came to acquire to a later generation a living value and significance. The interest in the marvellous and supernatural, which had been regarded as something archaic or at any rate an archaic survival in the cultured mind, became a way of escape into a wider vision of life. The master faculty and shaping principle of this vision was Imagination, in its romantic sense and implications as conceived by Wordsworth, Coleridge and others. The natural and the supernatural were contradistinguished indeed in the narrow view of reason on which eighteenth century put all its emphasis, but they were reconciled or undivided to the romantic imagination. The supernatural could not perhaps be resumed in poetry in the creative and objective

spirit of the heroic saga and lay, nor in the traditional and conventional way of the mediaeval dealers in romance, nor even in the dreamy backward glance in which its fading charm was caught by the Renaissance poets. But it was inherent in the poet's intuitions and imaginative apprehensions of life. With this recognition of its value and significance, supernaturalism acquired a fresh meaning and purpose to the romantic poet and became at once a note in what is called the ' romantic revolt.'

The difference in the use and appraisement of romance between the romantic age and the preceding century reveals pointedly this revolt against a partial rationalistic philosophy which cut off the supernatural from the vision of life. From Coleridge's autobiographical letters written in 1797 to Thomas Poole,* Wordsworth's references in Book V of *The Prelude*, Crabbe's account of his hero's readings in boyhood in *Silford Hall* † and perhaps from other sources, we may know what a large part of juvenile reading was formed during the eighteenth century by stories of romantic and supernatural flavour. They were supplemented by stories of like character handed down in the traditional Old Wives' Tales. Burns, as we have seen, speaks of ' the latent seeds of poetry ' being cultivated in him by such stories, and with the romantics of a later generation, this sense of their

* See *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by Hartley Coleridge, pp. 16 ff.

† " He sought his mother's hoard, and there he found
Romance in sheets and poetry unbound;"

—and the passage following describing the miscellaneous assortment of literature. See Crabbe's *Poetical Works* (Oxford ed.), p. 500.

use and value becomes stronger and clearer. The premium put upon mere chapbooks of romance, intended for nursery or juvenile reading, appears from certain remarks of Lamb and Wordsworth. Writing in 1802 to Coleridge, Lamb regrets that "Mrs. Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery" and "that beautiful interest in wild tales which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child," has been replaced by abstract knowledge of things learnt by rote.* Writing in the neighbourhood of the same year, Wordsworth in *The Prelude* recalls his own readings in boyhood, and blames for their banishment those

> "..... who have the skill
> To manage books and things, and make them act
> On infant minds as surely as the sun
> Deals with a flower;"
>
> (Book V, ll. 350-353.)

To Wordsworth's mind, there is a power wiser than these schoolmasters of the rationalising type,—the spirit that guides the 'unreasoning progress of the world.' A few years earlier, in 1797, Coleridge, whose own early years were fed abundantly on romance, had propounded in a letter to Thomas Poole the question: "Should children be permitted to read romances, and relations of giants and magicians and genii?" His own answer is Coleridgean—"I know all that has been said

* *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (ed. by Lucas), Vol. VI, pp. 252-253.

against it, but I have formed my faith in the affirmative ; I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the Great and the Whole.'' * To the comprehensive vision of life to be won by intuition and imagination, which romanticism sought to oppose to the rationalistic view, a vivid sense of the supernatural was believed to be the Open Sesame.

This romantic revaluation of supernaturalism, which comes in the train of a change in the traditional methods of forming young minds, makes a definite break with the preceding century. Old romance, folk-lore and even popular superstitions detach themselves from their old moorings. They no longer evoke the old instinctive sympathies to which they were addressed, but present themselves as themes of imagination, as literary motives, at the same time that their social aspects,—ballad recitations, fire-side tales of romance, the supernatural folk-lore,—are sinking into relics of an antiquated tradition.

'' In the nineteenth century,'' observes Prof. Ker, '' almost everywhere the old immemorial traditions of popular romance have withered up. The shepherds of Ettrick and Liddesdale know nothing of the old ballads, or know them only as a foreigner might know the Border minstrelsy, out of books. The fairy tales that once were English

* *Letters of S. T. Coleridge* (ed. by Hartley Coleridge), p. 16. Coleridge returned to the subject of the education of the young through ' works of imagination ' like the *Arabian Nights* in the course of his lectures delivered in the early part of 1818. See notes of Lecture XI of the Course of 1818 in Coleridge's *Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare* (Everyman's Library), pp. 216, 299 ff.

are known now mostly through Grimm, where they are known at all. Every child knows the *Travelling Companion* which was Peele's Old Wives' Tale, but they know it from Hans Andersen, not from their grandmothers." The folklorist tradition, the decay of which in the nineteenth century is related in a subtle manner to the growth of romanticism in its literature, had, however, a more enduring vitality in the conservative conditions of life north of the Tweed. It was in this region that the early romantic poets of the Scottish school exploited the decaying folk-lore for a fresh imaginative expression in legendary poetry, and in Allan Cunningham's *Traditional Tales*, with their interspersed ballads and popular poetry, the dying ebb of tradition is caught in a little pool of reminiscent fancy.* The significant anomaly is pointed out by Prof. Ker that " the eighteenth century, which generally did without romance in its literature, kept up the supply of romance for its children, and at least allowed the reading of romance to its grown men : while the nineteenth century, coming in with a great romantic revolution in literature, cuts off the tradition of romance among simpler unliterary people, takes away the *Seven Champions* from the schoolboy and the ballads from the countryside,— at the same time that motives of romance are being sought for everywhere by literary artists for their

* See Morley's Introduction to the *Traditional Tales*, published in Morley's Universal Library. Cunningham belonged to the school of Sir Walter Scott and the stories collected in the book were gathered mostly from Scottish folk-lore and published in London in 1832.

own purposes.'' * The explanation lies obviously in the development of a different outlook on the world of romance, literary or popular,—whether the romance of strange outlandish adventures or that of local legends or familiar folk-lore. Things, which had vital associations and produced reactions of belief or disbelief, became objects of purely aesthetic or artistic regard.

In dealing with the passages of supernaturalism in pre-romantic poetry in the next part of this work, we shall observe the sensibility towards the supernatural,—a thing of a different import from the truly romantic attitude towards it,—expressing itself in divergent ways. The attitude of Collins, Gray, the Wartons and their followers is evidently of a tentative and exploratory character. But with the growth of the romantic sense of an inherent imaginative value in the supernatural, we pass on from the mere efflorescence of sensibility towards it to the exploration by romantic temper and feeling of its artistic possibilities. Neither Collins nor his brother pre-romantics could discover what Coleridge, the 'subtle-soul'd psychologist,' perceived clearly, that the problem of poetic treatment of the supernatural was concerned not with the restoring of a positive faith, but with inducing a negative mental condition which he labelled as 'poetic faith.'† The antithesis between positive faith in the supernatural and poetic faith in it marks a difference of outlook

* Ker's Lecture on Romance (Eng. Ass. Pam., No. 10), pp. 13-14.
† See Appendix IV (Collectanea—H).

on the supernatural world, as well as a different conception of the mode of its treatment. "Of all intellectual powers," says Coleridge, "that of superiority to the fear of the invisible world is the most dazzling. Its influence is abundantly proved by the one circumstance that it can bribe us into a voluntary submission of our better knowledge, into suspension of all our judgment derived from constant experience, and enables us to peruse with the liveliest interest the wildest tales of ghosts, wizards, genii and secret talismans."* This 'escape from life,' mental distancing, the re-direction of the appeal of the supernatural from instinctive feelings to the detached aesthetic sense is the secret of the romantic poet's art in dealing with supernatural themes.

With these poets who take views of the supernatural world, not through any intellectual medium in relation to belief or disbelief, but through a new emotional and imaginative medium, supernaturalism becomes a matter of pure creative art. We can see how, in passing through this medium, even the gross superstitious forms of literary or popular romance are essentially transmuted. They seem to 'suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.' Of the bones of dead Superstition are coral made, and 'those are pearls that were his eyes.' It is an alchemy of imagination that transforms the familiar ballad-ghost of Sweet William into the strange passion-driven visitant from the underworld in Bürger's *Lenore*; the pitiful spectre

* *Ibid* (Collectanea—D).

in soiled and tattered rags in Boccaccio's story into the pale shadow in Keats's *Isabella*, listening in the hush of the grave to faint sounds of life above; the fatal glen-fairy of rustic superstition into the Circean mediaeval Venus in the knight's vision in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*; and the malignant elf-woman of the forest, half woman and half serpent like Melusine in the old fabliau of Jean d' Arras,* into Coleridge's inscrutable Lady Geraldine.

Behind the supernaturalism of romantic poetry, we thus find a formative artistic intention which is carried out deliberately, with delicate attention to strains and stresses on the imagination, avoiding all conflict with modes of thinking and feeling inculcated by intellectual culture. The intention expresses itself in different ways of the romantic spirit. But the conception of the supernatural itself as something that pertains not to the sphere of instincts, but to the world of pure imagination, and its treatment on clear artistic principles, became possible only through the intervention of an age of rationalism in culture. It is a long tale of consummating circumstances, embracing the form and mode of mediaeval supernatural romance, the subsequent stage of literary taste in which its fascination lingered while the literary mode became effete, the composite 'romantic tradition' of the eighteenth century, the romantic

* For the story of Melusine, see Ashton's *Romances of Chivalry*, told and illustrated in facsimile (Fisher Unwin, 1887). A version of this French romance was published also by the Early English Text Society, No. LXVIII.

revolt against its rationalistic outlook that opposed the natural to the supernatural, and finally, the re-emergence of supernaturalism as part of an imaginative vision of life and a renovated literary motive.

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PART I

SUPERNATURALISM IN PRE-ROMANTIC POETRY

AND

ITS ANTICIPATORY SIGNIFICANCE

SUPERNATURALISM IN PRE-ROMANTIC POETRY AND ITS ANTICIPATORY SIGNIFICANCE

(Latter Half of Eighteenth Century)

Supernatural Conceptions of Romantic Precursors

In the poets grouped together as the precursors of the English romantic movement, we observe the release and freedom from the inhibitions which were raised in the eighteenth century by a special interpretation of the old classical doctrine of following Nature. The interpretation itself, as we have seen, had a certain relation to a new scientific conception of Nature. But these poets of the pre-romantic era, in spite of their temperamental affinities, do not really set the course of romantic supernaturalism. With the sole exception of Blake the mystic,—a poet not set in his age,—the romantic precursors had their being in the eighteenth century, in which they moved, divided in spirit, but without the strength of vision or energy of self-expression to rise above its spiritual environment. They sound notes of mediaevalism; betray a new sentimental longing for

simplicity and nature ; turn wistfully from urbanity and its social and cultural preoccupations to solitude or rural life. But there is no reaching out towards a fresh imaginative reconception of life. Their turning to supernatural themes and motives is of like character,—tentative, exploratory and guided by no common urge, but by individual inclination, either intuitive and temperamental or merely cultured and literary. The main note of their supernaturalism is the same 'dividedness' of spirit. Their conceptions of the supernatural are distinguished on one hand by a new awareness and sensibility from the conventional use of them by poets of the classical school, and are marked off on the other hand, in their unrelatedness to any whole imaginative background, from later romantic treatment.

In their exploration of a somewhat unfamiliar world in poetry, the pre-romantic poets represent a few progressive minds for whom the lure of the supernatural lay in its pronounced and stimulating 'otherness.' Their practical object was to move English poetry out of the beaten track of tradition and give a new refreshment to its spirit, jaded by what Wordsworth calls

> "The repetitions wearisome of sense,
> Where soul is dead, and feeling hath no place."
> (*Excursion*, Bk. IV, ll. 620-21.)

They seek to represent a world different from or opposite to the 'nature and normality' of the neo-classic tradition, for which purpose they draw upon

'Gothic' mythology and legends, superstition and regional folklore, and even the illusions that belong to the subjective world,—'beckoning shapes,' 'airy voices,' lurid apparitions, ghosts and goblins haunting the ruins and graveyards. There is no attempt at refinement or transmutation of this somewhat dull crude ore,—the conceptions of popular superstition are set forth as such, the beings of myth or legend are presented in the old mythological atmosphere, and the illusions and hallucinations of excited fancy are not made to simulate, as for instance in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*,* a shadowy objective character. They are not produced out of the 'creative imagination,' and the effect aimed at is only the instinctive reaction, the feeling of terror or awe, except perhaps in Burns, evoked by a concrete presentment of forms and figures out of what Collins describes as 'the world unknown' of all the 'shadowy shapes' of Fear.

It is not in any new romantic vision of life, such as endows with significance even juvenile stories of romance to the minds of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb,† that the pre-romantic poets set their conceptions of the supernatural. With these poets, they are the expression and outgrowth of a sensibility, on the presence of which in the literary consciousness of the 'age of reason' we have commented in the Introduction, representing a reaction against tradition and a move forward of

* See Part V.

† See Introduction, pp. 33-35.

the aesthetic spirit. The supernatural in their poetry stands, therefore, in the trappings of sensibility, but imaginatively unrelated to life,—not bound up as with the mediaevalist poets with a backward vision of the past, or with a fresh romantic outlook on the world of man and Nature as with Wordsworth and Coleridge. Having no grounding in any imaginative comprehension of life, their conceptions have no distinctive or unifying character and are curiously dispersed. They sometimes reappear, but only in faint side-influences, as will be noticed in due connection, in later romantic poetry, but the course of supernaturalism in it flows almost wholly aside from pre-romantic 'Gothicism' and 'Celticism,' the distempered activities of imagination in the poetry of younger Thomas Warton and his followers, the delicate drollery of folk-superstition by Burns.

Yet the poets of the period, by their dealings with the supernatural, carve out of the field of traditional sentimental philosophy a definite scope for the romantic imagination. We shall notice in passing how, in their treatment of the supernatural, inner conflicts appear between tradition and temperament, the old eighteenth-century interests of poetry and the new. Aside from this general significance, there are suggested motives, as the motive of terror in Collins and Gray, or implied ideas, as that of the power of solitude to evoke supernatural sensibilities in man, which come into relation with romantic supernaturalism in its different phases.

Collins and Gray

To Gray and Collins a sort of pioneer importance may be assigned in the revival of the supernatural note in English romantic poetry. To appreciate the significance of their work, we need only consider a few typical eighteenth-century poems which display a supernatural element, *e.g.*, Parnell's *Fairy Tale*, Mallet's *Margaret's Ghost*, Glover's *Admiral Hosier's Ghost*, and John Langhorne's *Owen of Carron*.

Even a cursory view reveals what is really lacking in the supernatural passages of these poems. Set nominally against a background of Arthurian romance, Parnell's tale, told in sprawling verses, of the transference of the haunch of Edwin to the back of Sir Thopas by superhuman moral mentors, rises hardly above the quality of a half-humorous nursery tale. The supernatural horse-play is made to point a moral, which seems to indicate that, even if the poet had the motive of dealing with supernatural incidents at all, it laboured under a sort of inhibitory impulse. In Mallet's elegant and polished ballad, one of the most popular poems of the eighteenth century, the Ghost, so striking a figure in the original old ballad with his sepulchral reminiscences and cold shivering accents, is transformed into a philosophising sentimentalist. In Glover's spirited poem, the ghost of the admiral, attended with his sheeted ghostly troop, stands forth as a blustering old sailor who blusters as well in death as he could in life. A futile attempt is made

to throw a grandeur round him, but without any effect of weirdness or eeriness, and one feels that the spirits could be exhibited as well by daylight as under ' the moon's wan lustre ' at midnight. The feeble touch of weirdness in the ' wayward sister,' who prophesies the doom of young Nithisdale, in *Owen of Carron* is excrescent and contributes nothing to the intended effect of the story. The eighteenth-century poets betray no real sense of the supernatural at all, the introduction of which is with them a kind of poetic embellishment. But a desire to evoke this sense out of the irrational and emotional depths of the human mind finds articulate utterance through some of the characteristic poems of Collins and Gray.

Collins's *Ode to Fear* and *Ode on the Popular Superstitions*, the latter of which was long suppressed and has come down in a lacunose and unfinished condition, deserve to be read together. Collins was a scholar of wide reading, and he approached popular superstitions through a sensibility which had been bred in him by the study of Greek tragedy, Tasso and Shakespeare. The themes of Greek tragedy excite the emotions of pity and fear, and Collins was perhaps temperamentally more susceptible to the latter. But to Collins's mind, the ' unknown world of fear with all its shadowy shapes' embraced not only the ' visions old ' conjured up by Aeschylus and Shakespeare, but also the living superstitions that haunt the rustic mind. In the antistrophe of the *Ode to Fear*, Collins links up the two and adjures the Spirit of Fear to keep him from being overawed as well by the terrible images of the

Greek tragic Muse as by the fearful conceptions of the uncultured folk-mind :

" Dark Power! with shudd'ring meek submitted thought,
Be mine, to read the visions old,
Which thy awak'ning bards have told:
And lest thou meet my blasted view,
Hold each strange tale devoutly true;
Ne'er be I found, by thee o'erawed,
Is that thrice-hallow'd eve, abroad,
When ghosts, as cottage-maids believe,
Their pebbled beds permitted leave,
And goblins haunt, from fire or fen,
Or mine, or flood, the walks of men."

Viewing thus in the same perspective, as it were, the sublime creations of ancient poets, their ' visions old,' and the humble rustic superstitions of Halloween, he seems to perceive a new artistic possibility. The same kind of imaginative effect as the ancients had achieved out of primaeval myth and legend could be yielded even by folklore and current superstition. Collins's *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands*, considered, as the title has it, as ' subjects of poetry,' was inspired by this discovery. The ode was inscribed to Home who had already demonstrated his power of using such matter to striking effect in the spirited drama of *Douglas*, wrought out of the theme of the old Scottish ballad of *Child Maurice*, and when Collins addressed the ode to him, he was in the charmed ' north countrie ' to which clung not only the traditions of minstrelsy and balladry, but also the old-

world Celtic lays chanted by ' runic bards ' of old and the marvellous heroic legends that passed from mouth to mouth in many a shepherd's ' shiel.' Through the medium of Home's poetic genius, Collins expected to call back into English poetry the traditional romance of the North. But with all his secret mental affinity to the coming romantic age, Collins is perhaps root-bound to the tradition of the eighteenth century, and so his unorthodox enthusiasm seems to be cut across towards the end of the ode by the current of prevailing rationalism, and he pleads the precedents of Shakespeare and Tasso in defence of such ' false themes ' (st. xi). The undertone of doubt and diffidence is heard when he speaks wistfully of Tasso's ' undoubting mind ' as of an enchanting power lost irrevocably to his own age. A belief in the supernatural appeared to him to be essential even for a gifted poet to bring out the latent poetic possibilities of superstitions and folklore.

The world, which Collins had only dreamt of exploiting, lay partially revealed to Gray in Norse mythology and Celtic legends. He was first attracted to them through his erudite interest in archaeology and literary antiquities, and, following in the steps of Percy,* he made a few imitations from Norse intended for insertion in a projected History of English Poetry " as specimens of the style that reigned in ancient times among the neighbouring nations, or those who had subdued the greater part

* Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* translated from the Icelandic Language (1763).

of this island and were our progenitors.''* Barring *The Bard*, which is an original and perfectly concerted ode, his short poems on Welsh and Norse themes are based more or less on Latin versions contained in the works of Torfaeus, Bartholin and Evans,† and Gray sometimes keeps close to his secondary sources.‡ But behind the selection of the pieces, there was perhaps something more than mere antiquarian interest or anthological purpose. *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin* specially are conceived in a way that suggests a deliberate intention on the poet's part to evoke imaginative response from a primaeval mythus just coming by glimpses into the ken of antiquarians and scholars. With contemporary readers, the poet's intention seems to have been very well fulfilled. The orthodox critics blamed Gray's Norse poems for their 'mysterious' dealing with the 'dark diableries of the Gothic times,' while critics of a different turn found them 'stamped with the most evident marks of a vigorous imagination, occupied by the notions of gloomy superstition.'§

* See Advertisement to 'Poems by Mr. Gray,' 1768. (*Poetical Works of Gray and Collins*, ed. by Poole, Oxford Edition, p. 67.)

† See Notes in Tovey's edition of *Gray's Poems* in which the Latin versions are given.

‡ Compare the Latin text in Torfaeus (quoted with English translation at p. 240 of Tovey's ed. of *Gray's Poems* with *The Fatal Sisters* and the text in Bartholin (*ibid* at p. 248) with the *Descent of Odin*. "It will be noticed," says Tovey, "that Gray's poem (on the Descent of Odin) is upon the whole nearer to the Latin text than is the case with The Sisters" (p. 251).

§ See extracts from reviews of Gray's Norse poems in the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* of May, 1768, quoted in Farley's *Scandinavian Influence in the English Romantic Movement* (1903), p. 36.

It is true enough that with the exception of *The Bard*, Gray's four Welsh and two Norse poems are entitled to little merit on the score of creative power. But in presenting them to minds, nurtured on the insipid conventions of current poetry, he was exploring new possibilities by touching the hidden springs of supernatural awe and terror in primitive myth and legend. The Fatal Sisters have something of the mysterious awfulness of the ' weird sisters ' of Shakespeare to which the poet adds the terribleness of their lust for blood and war. They loom gigantic, fierce and terrible through a savage atmosphere, reeking with blood and ringing with the clash of arms. In *The Descent of Odin*, the mysteries of necromancy are suggested in the process by which Odin awakens the dust of the prophetic maid :

" Thrice he traced the runic rhyme :
Thrice pronounc'd, in accents dread,
The thrilling verse that wakes the Dead :
Till from out the hollow ground
Slowly breath'd a sullen sound."

The Bard is Gray's imaginative reconstruction of the death-song of a Welsh bard who, in order to escape the massacre ordered by Edward I, flung himself from the top of a high precipice into the river Conway. The Bard's passionate lamentation over the fates of other massacred bards has the effect of incantation as it were and seems to call up from their ' grisly beds of death ' ' the dear lost companions of his tuneful art.' Then the ghostly

chorus of the brother-bards, vaguely foreshadowing the horrors in store for the murderer's hapless line, begins with fateful words that seem almost to vibrate with the sternness of doom (ll. 49-100).

Collins and Gray are out to discover new realms for English poetry. In their spiritual vagabondage in quest of new poetic motives and new aesthetic possibilities, they stray into the world of primitive supernaturalism of which, however, they are unable to discern the demarcations and boundaries. Their view ranges indifferently over the teeming conceptions of superstition and folk-lore as well as the old-world myths of classical, Welsh and Norse mythologies. But they recover the fundamental idea, long overlaid by misconceived critical theories, that the supernatural may be exploited even by modern poets for striking imaginative effects, specially the effect of terror which is approved by classical usage. They experiment with this idea, though with feeble and somewhat hesitant power.

Echoes from the supernatural terror-motive, studied by Collins and Gray, are borne on the rising wind of romanticism into later poetry, as in Rogers's *Ode to Superstition* or Southey's juvenile ode *To Horror*.

Rogers harks back undoubtedly to the spirit of Gray's treatment of Norse and Welsh myths and legends, though he expands the motive, rummaging for it, beyond the limited range of Gray's interests, into the grotesque and terrible superstitions of different ages and far countries: while Southey, touched perhaps by the influence of Rogers's ode, finds it even in the present in scenes of terror and

images of agonised death. But, aside from such casual treatment, the motive of supernatural terror is but slightly developed in romantic poetry until it receives from the examples of a type of German romantic literature a peculiarly morbid turn and direction.* The terror-motive finds a refuge meanwhile in the literary reproduction of the antiquarian interest in the so-called 'Gothic' times which evolved curiously from art and architecture to legends and romances, from Strawberry Hill to the *Castle of Otranto*, the real hero of which, by the way, is not the tyrant Manfred but the animated statue of Alphonso. It was this Gothic-*cum*-terror motive that produced Blake's *Fair Elenor*, a crude but original effort of his juvenile imagination, stirred to poetic expression perhaps by the Gothic monuments among which his work lay as Basire's apprentice. The poem turns on a single situation, set in Gothic *mise en scène*, of horror which develops with the usual hair-raising properties. The grim incidents are such as one might take straight out of Walpolean or later Radcliffean tales. But leaving aside this solitary poem of Blake's, the tales of terror, so prolific and popular during late eighteenth century, leave no outstanding mark on romantic poetry, though a very important side-influence of them makes itself felt, as will be shown later,† in the atmosphere of romantic supernatural poems like Coleridge's *Christabel* (Part I) or Hood's *Haunted House*.

* See Part III of the present work.

† See Part IV of the present work. Also Part VI (under Hood).

Thomas Warton and the Eighteenth-Century Poetry of 'Imagination'

With Thomas Warton the younger and the poetasters of later eighteenth century who follow up or imitate the supernatural mood of his many-mooded 'melancholy,' we come upon a different and perhaps more interesting line of expression of the supernatural sensibility. Their medium of expression for this sensibility is not the regional folklore or the primitive communal myth, but the mental experience of the individual under the spell of night and solitude. The change in their attitude towards the supernatural from myths and legends to the mental mood and experience, is a phenomenon which connects itself, though only through underlying ideas, with the later psychological phase of romantic supernaturalism.

In the poetic effusions which Thomas Warton's *Pleasures of Melancholy* appears to initiate, the relation of ghostly visions and supernatural visitings to an emotional or irrational state of mind, the activity of a kind of imagination stirred and stimulated by solitude, illusions carrying the thrill and horror of supernatural existences, impart a peculiarly lurid tone and colour to the poet's sentimental musings. Such poetry really embodies and sets forth a current eighteenth-century conception of Imagination, but reaches forward beyond its intrinsic quality to finer imaginative possibilities.

Scattered through eighteenth-century poetry, there are numerous poems on solitude, but the difference in tone is remarkable between those coming before Warton's *Pleasures of Melancholy* like Pope's *Ode on Solitude* or Thomson's *Hymn on Solitude* and those after it like Grainger's *Ode to Solitude*. As promoting contentment of mind, as conducive to philosophic contemplation, as the nursery of innocence and moral virtue, solitude is hailed in many an ode in English 'Augustan' poetry. But Warton found a different use for it. The *Pleasures of Melancholy*, a somewhat rambling poem of mediocre merit, belonging to the teeming brood of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, is yet interesting in its heterogeneous mixture of elements,—some purely conventional, some weakly imitative, some feeble borrowings out of traditional philosophy, but along with them, a new element which finds marked prominence and precedence. The 'pleasures' of melancholy in its Miltonic sense of pensive contemplation, are shown in different and several sorts,—in rousing the mind to moralise over 'the fleeting state of things, the vain delights and fruitless toils,' a hackneyed theme of 'Augustan' poetry; in soothing the love-lorn heart; in offering opportunities for the delights of quiet study, a Miltonic thought; but first and foremost of all, in quickening a faculty the working of which is like the conjuration of necromancy:

" .....But when the world
Is clad in Midnight's raven-colour'd robe,
'Mid hollow charnel let me watch the flame
Of taper dim, shedding a livid glare

O'er the wan heaps; while airy voices talk
Along the glimmering walls; or ghostly shape,
At distance seen, invites with beckoning hand
My lonesome steps, through the far-winding vaults.''*

The lurid passage is perhaps only a mingled echo of Burton and Milton.† It harks back to Burton in its relation to the theme of Melancholy,—to Milton in its 'airy voices' and 'beckoning hand.' It is original nonetheless in the service it yields to the cause of romanticism by rehabilitating a note long discountenanced in English poetry.

The faculty of supernatural vision, associated by Thomas Warton with the mood of melancholy, is a primitive one, overlaid by the acquired cultural habitude of ages. Yet it lies but dormant in the human mind until congenial conditions,—solitude, midnight, ruins, graveyard or forest,—recall and start its activity. The poets and philosophers of the eighteenth century were well aware of its malign nature and influence, and they termed it indifferently Fancy or Imagination, viewing it as a kind of mental disorder or disease, a matter of mental

* See *British Poets*, Vol. LXVIII, pp. 57-58.

† "Methinks I hear, methinks I see
Ghosts, goblins, fiends; my phantasie
Presents a thousand ugly shapes," etc.
—Burton's *Lines on Melancholy*

".....A thousand phantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows dire,
And aery tongues that syllable men's names
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses."
——*Comus*

pathology. The physician-poet Armstrong, not long before Thomas Warton's poem was published, had spoken thus of the ill effects of solitude:

"'Tis the great art of life to manage well
The restless mind. For ever on pursuit
Of knowledge bent, it starves the grosser powers:
Quite unemploy'd, against its own repose
It turns its fatal edge, and sharper pangs
Than what the body knows imbitter life;
Chiefly where Solitude, sad nurse of Care,
To sickly musing gives the pensive mind.
There Madness enters; and the dim-eyed fiend,
Sour Melancholy, night and day provokes
Her own eternal wound. The sun grows pale;
A mournful visionary light o'erspreads
The cheerful face of Nature: earth becomes
A dreary desert, and heaven frowns above.
Then various shapes of cursed illusion rise:
Whate'er the wretched fears, creating Fear
Forms out of nothing; and with monsters teems,
Unknown in hell. The prostrate soul beneath
A load of huge *imagination* heaves;
And all the horrors that the murderer feels,
With anxious flutterings, wake the guiltless breast."*

* *Art of Preserving Health*, Book IV (*British Poets*, LXVII, pp. 74-75). It is probable that Churchill's fling in the following lines of *The Ghost*, Bk. IV, was provoked by this passage:

"Imagination, through the trick
Of doctors, often makes us sick;
And why, let any sophist tell,
May it not likewise make us well?"

The passage, lengthy and verbose, invites, notwithstanding, critical notice as disclosing the points that divide two schools of thought and feeling in the eighteenth century, typified by Armstrong and Warton respectively. Warton loves solitude, Armstrong condemns it; to Warton, melancholy offers pleasures, to Armstrong it holds only pains; the ghastly visions that attract Warton, repel Armstrong as strongly; lastly, Warton passionately welcomes what to Armstrong is only 'a load of huge imagination.'

The 'imagination,' which the physician-poet finds so deleterious to the health of the mind, is identical with the faculty of supernatural vision, quickened by the mood of the hour or the temporary influence of surroundings, the play of which appears, perhaps for the first time in the poetry of the age, in Thomas Warton's poem. Horace Walpole, following the line of critical thinking of his time, set up in the Preface to the *Castle of Otranto* a theoretical opposition between what he called respectively Nature and Imagination, and the inroad of the latter in the poetry of later eighteenth century is truly remarkable. It evokes a faculty, long suppressed by canon and tradition, into a new activity in English poetry, while it serves also to displace the worn-out poetic tradition of moral philosophising. While the scope is decidedly enlarged for the 'imaginative' temper of mind, a rich vein of ore seems also to be struck, yielding the sensibilities, the thrills, the primitive intuitive feelings, which poets of a later period were to put to such fine romantic uses. It is

interesting to trace the growth of imagination, conceived in this sense, in the so-called ' graveyard poetry ' of the eighteenth century.

For the typical poet of that century, the use of midnight and solitude lay in the opportunity offered for philosophic contemplation. The midnight hour is thus hailed by Young in the *Night Thoughts* (Night V) :

" .....Auspicious Midnight! Hail!
The world excluded, ev'ry passion hush'd
And open'd a calm intercourse with Heaven,
Here the soul sits in council; ponders past,
Predestines future action; sees, not feels,
Tumultuous life, and reasons with the storm;
All her lies answers, and thinks down her charms."

The poets were well aware at the same time of a dangerous spell of midnight and solitude, and so Cooper, before he proceeds to contemplate the glories of ancient philosophy, the ' charms of moral beauty,' and the harmony of the universe in the auspicious silence of night, first exorcises the spell of the supernatural :

" But what perceive we in these dusky groves,
Where cypress with funereal horror shades
Some ruin'd tomb; where deadly hemlock chills
Th' unfruitful glebe, and sweating yews distil
Immedicable poison? In those plains
Black Melancholy dwells with silent Fear
And Superstition fierce, the foulest fiend

That ever sullied light;.....

.....

From the good

Far be this horrid group!" *

In the same spirit Young calls upon Lorenzo in an energetic passage in Night VIII to make up his choice between the 'fatal arrows' which Melancholy (called 'feeble happiness') forges in the 'Paphian shop' of Imagination and other thoughts, that is, those of high moral philosophy which descend from above on 'angel wing.'†

But midnight and solitude had for minds of a different complexion far other uses than those found by the poet of the *Night Thoughts*. They were auspicious to Imagination that loves to dwell on supernatural visions. To Joseph Warton, brother of the author of the *Pleasures of Melancholy*, the very spirit of Solitude appears like a ghost at 'deep dead of night,' walking forth :

" .....beneath the pale moon's light
In robe of flowing black array'd,
While cypress leaves her brows o'ershade; "

* *The Power of Harmony*, Bk. II *British Poets*, LXXII, pp. 79-80).

† " Imagination is the Paphian shop,
Where feeble happiness, like Vulcan lame,
Bids foul ideas, in their dark recess,
And hot as hell (which kindled the black fires),
With wanton art, those fatal arrows form,
Which murder all thy time, health, wealth, and fame;
Woulds't thou receive them? other thoughts there are,
On angel wing, descending from above,
Which these, with art divine, would counterwork,
And form celestial armour for thy peace."
—Night VIII.

Apostrophising Solitude, the poet says :

> " Thou, that on the meadow green
> Or daisied upland art not seen." *

—all its associations being supernatural, awful, death-boding. Headley, the friend and class-mate of Bowles, of whom it was said that he

> " On Cherwell's sedgy bank with Warton stray'd
> And woo'd the Muse in Gothic stole arrayed; " †

was full of his master's enthusiasm for melancholy, and his somewhat imitative *Invocation to Melancholy* is conceived in Warton's vein and calls up the same sort of gruesome supernatural images :

> " .....ghastly visions wild, and train unbless'd
> Of ashy fiends, at dead of murky night,
> Who catch the fleeting soul, and slowly pace
> With visage dimly seen and beckoning hand,
> Of shadowy forms that ever on the wing
> Flit by the tedious couch of wan despair."‡

So Graeme in *A Nightpiece* dwells, not on the thin threadbare philosophy of the school of Thomson and Young, but on ' steamy vapours carved to giant forms,' ' the red blue meteor,' ' the light-heel'd fairies,' ' pale goblins screaming out of desolated

* Ode *To Solitude* (*British Poets*, LXVIII, p. 251).

† *Verses on the Death of Mr. Headley* by Kett (*British Poets*, LXXIII, p. 92).

‡ *British Poets*, LXXIII, p. 100.

castles,' 'the sullen ghost in sheeted grandeur,' along with other images, somewhat conventional, of horror, misery or woe, taken from life.*

On the clash of moods and temperaments between the contemners and the advocates of Imagination, Doctor Johnson's observations through the mouth of Imlac contain the typical comment of the 'neo-classic' school of criticism.† The Doctor is of opinion that no human mind is in the right state,—in fact, between Reason and Imagination the mind is ever in a state of unstable equilibrium and the balance is but too often disturbed on the side of the latter. 'All power of fancy over reason' is to him 'a degree of insanity,' towards which solitude leads the mind by letting it 'indulge the power of fiction and send imagination out upon the wing.' The spiritual conflict in life, noted by Doctor Johnson, reflects itself accurately in the running jar between 'philosophy' and 'imagination' that disturbs so acutely the modish poise and serenity of the Muse of his age. Doctor Johnson's remark is a pointer to Goethe's famous dictum, which a contemporary English critic has thought fit to revive and re-interpret,‡ that 'Classicism is health and Romanticism the disease.' In the *Pleasures of Melancholy* and the poetry of 'imagination' to which it gives rise, a new romantic value, however crude, emerges for those intuitions and sensibilities which the classicist re-

* *Ibid*, LXXXI, pp. 260 ff.

† See *Rasselas*, Chapter XLIV, headed.
'The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination.'

‡ Abercrombie : *Romanticism* (Martin Secker, 1925).

garded as having only an interest of mental pathology. The Wartonians thus seem to pave the way for the fresh romantic revaluation of them by Wordsworth and Coleridge.*

Beattie's Minstrel and Scottish Mediaevalism

With Beattie's *Minstrel*, we make a nearer approach to the romantic age, and Beattie links himself more closely than either Collins and Gray or Thomas Warton and the Wartonians to the actual beginnings of romantic poetry by virtue of a concrete reference. Foreshadowing dimly the magic of old legends and communal traditions in its account of the growth of a poet's mind, the poem serves as a pointer to romantic legendary poetry which aimed at resumption of the minstrel's functions in a modern world. But Beattie himself seems to be unaware of the romantic implications of his theme, and is evidently concerned to show how his minstrel, the child of the savage North, is civilized, as we might say, into a ' respectable ' character. " The design," says Beattie in the Preface, " was to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician ;—a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred."† The anticipation of the theme of *The*

* See Part IV (under ' Nature and Supernaturalism ').
† See *British Poets*, LXXVIII, p. 127.

Prelude is apparent, but what Nature does for the poet's mind in Wordsworth's poem, shaping it by diverse influences into fitness for its true vocation, a Hermit of the true eighteenth-century breed seems to do for Beattie's hero.

The poem was composed and published in the midst of the literary sensation during the seventeen-seventies, roused by ballad poetry which from Percy to Scott was identified, erroneously as later scholarship and research have proved, with mediaeval minstrelsy. Percy's *Reliques* and his introductory essay on the 'Ancient Minstrels of England' had served to project on popular imagination the figure of the minstrel, magnifying it in a way that merged all the difference between the rough 'croud' of the ballad-singer and the minstrel's courtly harp. The minstrel stood out as a strange, arresting mediaeval figure, the type and symbol of a romantic past, rather than as a definite historical person. He came out of the mysterious North and sang of things strange and events far-off. The sources of his inspiration were different; his feelings and intuitions were of another order; and both Nature and supernatural visions fed the springs of his imagination. It was the unlikeness of the minstrel to the modern poet that lent to the romantic mind the endearing charm and fascination of his personality. But Beattie is at work to reduce this unlikeness by bringing other and more familiar influences to bear upon him. The hero of the poem, Edwin, also belongs by birth and ancestry to the 'north countrie' (Bk. I, st. xi), and he nourishes his wild northern imagination not

only on the beauty and grandeur of Nature, but also on lonely visions of ghastly dread and pageantries in the air. To his simple ' untutor'd mind,' the curfew hour brings dreams of ' graves and corpses pale ' and ghosts thronging to the charnel dungeon (Bk. I, st. xxxii), and the setting moon visions of faery and of chivalric romance (Bk. I, st. xxxiii). Having so sublimely nurtured his imagination, the hapless youth falls into the hands of a hermit who instructs him in the approved style of the typical eighteenth-century philosopher that

> " .....The mind untaught
> Is a dark waste, where fiends and tempests howl;
> As Phoebus to the world, is science to the soul."
> (Book II, st. xlvi.)

The second book thus becomes a sort of palinode to the first, and the conflict during those years between the new interest in the romantic and the supernatural and the old interest in science, reason and philosophy finds a concrete expression and embodiment in this somewhat drowsy-frowsy poem. With Beattie apparently the eighteenth-century interest wins and his hero ' proceeds the path of science to explore ' (Bk. II, st. lvi). But the study and exposition of the minstrel mind was a sort of cue to Scottish mediaevalism and the poetry of mediaeval legends and romance it evoked.

The minstrel mind is the disguise which the Scottish romantic poets assume in their ' modern antique ' literary fashion and style. In their treat-

ment of mediaeval legends, they arrogate to themselves, as it were, the minstrel's mediaeval mentality, turning to the traditionary themes which, in the words of Scott, " we may suppose in elder times to have employed the harps of the minstrel,"* with an affectation of the same wonderment and sensibility. With Beattie's *Minstrel* and the legendary poetry of the Scottish school, which we shall deal with in the next part, there seems thus to be an underground connection,—the one being a study of the minstrel mind, the other an attempt to reproduce and render its creative and imaginative impulses.

Burns and the Serio-comic Supernatural

Burns, the most original and perhaps the most romantic among the pre-romantic poets, strikes out in a few of his poems what may be regarded as a side-track opening out of the main line of supernaturalism in romantic poetry. It projects through some of the ballads and ' metrical tales ' of Southey (*e.g.*, *The Old Woman of Berkeley*) to the serio-comic supernatural of Hood and Praed. Burns's own achievements in the line are so striking and

* " The Third Class of Ballads are announced to the public as Modern Imitations of the ancient style of composition, in that department of poetry, and they are founded upon such traditions, as we may suppose in the elder times would have employed the harps of the minstrels. This kind of poetry has been supposed capable of uniting the vigorous numbers and wild fictions, which occasionally charm us in the ancient ballad, with a greater equality of versification, and elegance of sentiment, than we can expect to find in the works of a rude age."—Scott's Introduction to the *Minstrelsy*.

remarkable that, among the pre-romantics dealing with supernatural themes, he is perhaps the only poet who stands on his own clear merits. But the source of his inspiration lies elsewhere and his view of the supernatural world is not from the usual angle.

Burns approaches the supernatural, not through the cultured sensibility of Collins and Gray, but through a sensibility of a wholly different kind that arises out of his intimate experience of the queerly mixed stuff of life. His genial, kindly, humorous interest in all phases of rustic life,—a predominating interest with the poet, arising not out of mere democratic sympathy, but some kinship of feeling and sentiment,—comprehends those irrational modes of thinking and feeling which sway so largely the unsophisticated folk-mind. The poet confesses in his autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, which has been already noticed in the Introduction, that he himself is not wholly above them, and perhaps a secret sympathy with the irrational accounts for the intimate vividness of his treatment, alike of the superstitious rites of Halloween, the witches' dance in Alloway Kirk, the rustic tricks and grave exploits of the Devil, and even the grotesque apparition of Death that arises in a time of pestilence to the drink-dulled eyes of the village apothecary.

Thus with Burns supernaturalism is not an idea to be approached through romantic legends, as with the later-coming school of Scott, or through primitive myths and creations of tragic poets, as with Collins and Gray, or even through supersti-

tions viewed distantly through an imaginative medium as suggested to Home by Collins, but a real and instinctive feeling to be captured in the very complex of human life. To this feeling which appears so noticeably on the surface of minds not overlaid with culture, Burns gives clear and concrete embodiment. He does not seem to dig for it as poets like Collins and Gray seem to do, but he catches it lightly and easily on the surface.

Realising the variegated woof of this instinctive feeling in the texture of the folk-mind, he does not attempt to extricate out of it only the dark-coloured strand of fear, for the woof of it is of many strands. Amusement, fun, dread, and its opposite, a hail-fellow-well-met sort of familiarity, are all mixed up, and with wonderful psychological truth, in his treatment, and the odd mixture is mildly tempered with a satirical intention which curiously reminds us that Burns belongs to the rationalistic century. His manner is in fact so intimately individual as to be inimitable, appearing to be something midway between the happy dallying with the supernatural in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the solemn intercourse with it in romantic poetry.

The group of poems in which Burns deals with themes of supernatural legend or popular superstition will be noticed in Appendix I.

PART II

THE SUPERNATURAL IN ROMANTIC MEDIAEVALISTIC TREATMENT

Sec. A—Legendary Poetry of the Scottish School (1780-1800)

Sec. B—Romantic Narrative Poetry (1805-1820)

THE SUPERNATURAL IN ROMANTIC MEDIAEVALISTIC TREATMENT

Legendary and Narrative Poetry of the Scottish Romantic School

Romantic Appraisement of Ballads and Legends

The earliest phase of ' romantic ' supernaturalism, as distinct from the pre-romantic dealings with the motive, unfolds itself in the poetry of Scottish mediaevalism, which, beginning in the decade of Percy's *Reliques* and the ' ballad revival ' in a trickle of legendary tales in verse, expanded from Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) into the fuller and more diversified current of the romantic narrative. Although a section of a wider and more comprehensive movement for the revival of the mediaeval past,—its mythology, art and architecture, poetry, romance and social life,—Scottish mediaevalism, as we shall presently observe, attained to a more definite aim and a more realistic vision. The supernatural was involved in this vision of mediaeval life, no less integrally and significantly, perhaps, than the feudal or chivalric features and properties.

In turning from the dispersed conceptions of the pre-romantic poets to the supernaturalism of this poetry, we become aware at once of a crucial difference. The supernatural is no longer a matter of

sensibility and feeling for its own sake : it is part of a special imaginative vision turned towards the past and its strangely adventurous modes of being. The transition externally seems to be from mere attempts at exciting and evoking a sense of the supernatural to formal artistic treatment of it. But behind the external test of expression lies the plastic power of that intuition of the romantic spirit which restored the supernatural out of a mere mental sensibility to the poet's imaginative comprehension of life.* We feel this power in its plenitude in Scott's large colourful renderings of Scottish feudal life, but it is inherent also in the legendary poetry which deals with isolated episodes and incidents of ' localised romance.'

These legendary poems are now stowed away in the numerous ballad-anthologies that followed Percy's *Reliques* and are best sampled in their latest specimens in Scott's *Minstrelsy*. Both legendary poetry, representing an earlier and cruder stage of Scottish mediaevalism, and its developed continuation in lays and narratives present, however, essentially the same romantic vision of the past,—its types of feudal life, action and adventure that admit largely of the intervention or influence of supernatural agents and incidents. The supernatural elements of this poetry come out of a different house, lying wide away from the ' Gothic ' superstitions, Norse myths and Celtic legends handled by poets like Gray and Collins, and its furnishings may

* See Introduction, pp. 32-33.

be seen stored in the introductions, notes and appendices that quaintly embroider Scott's poetical works including the *Minstrelsy*.

The most concrete and colourful of the materials are the old ballads and legends which used to be regarded a generation earlier by Percy and contemporary ballad-revivalists as mere antiquarian 'reliques' or at best as 'survivals in culture.' During the interval of time between Percy and Scott, however, a new spirit and vision comes to play upon them, changing altogether their complexion and interest and transforming them from dead relics to vivid fragments of life. We may well give the name of romanticism to this transforming influence, and it operates on the old antiquarian materials by a twofold process —first, a complete revaluation of folklore and folk-poetry, and secondly, a turning of their superstitious conceptions to what may be termed a transformed interest. But it is only when we pass on to Scott from the decade of ballad revival and Beattie's *Minstrel*, through the academic labours and controversies of Herd and Ritson, that the process seems to show itself in a retrospect as it were.

The final effect and consummation of the 'romanticising' of folk-poetry is seen in the high claim advanced by Wordsworth on behalf of Percy's work that English poetry has been 'absolutely redeemed' by it.* Wordsworth and perhaps many of his contemporaries must have felt in the old ballads romantic qualities and affinities that modern

* See *Essay supplementary to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (*Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 950).

criticism is apt to deny,* for, between Percy and Scott, ballad poetry put forth two side-issues which brought it immediately into vital intimacy with the romantic temper.

Percy, intending chiefly to illustrate "the gradual improvement of English language and poetry," had selected, as he says, such specimens "as either show the gradation of our language, exhibit the progress of popular opinions, display the peculiar manners and customs of the former ages or throw light on our earlier classical poets."† Of all these, it was the 'peculiar manners and customs of the former ages' that began to fascinate a class of readers of the *Reliques*, like young Scott sitting under a tree in the garden at Kelso enchanted with its first perusal.‡ The intellectual atmosphere of the time was also stirred and pervaded as with a subtle smell by the paradoxical social philosophy which Rousseau had let loose on the mind of Europe. That 'Nature,' the sentimental longing for which had filtered down from Rousseau through Herder to Goethe and Schiller, was glimpsed in the 'rude, simple, violent' world of recovered folk-poetry, and that 'naïvete,' which Schiller explains as 'nature standing in contrast with art and rebuking it,'§ was sampled in its strains. The German mind was

* See Appendix II.

† *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (Everyman's Library, Vol. I, p. 3).

‡ See *Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 563 (*Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad*).

§ Essay *Upon Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (trans. in World's Great Classics, Vol. of Essays of Fr., Ger., and Ital. Essayists, p. 187).

perhaps more captivated than the British by this adventitious charm, but Scott must have felt it in Border balladry,—not, however, as a far-off charm alluring for its remote elusiveness, but something real to be won and captured from the history, society and folklore which formed a setting to this balladry.

Against this background of a wider romantic feeling, ballad poetry and its legendary materials began to glow with a vivid enchanting interest to a school of early romantics in Scotland. The 'reliques,' edited by Percy, had come chiefly from the country between Edinburgh and Yorkshire, where the expiring literary tradition still lingered on in the backwaters of social life, and the history of Scott's impressing a body of antiquarians, Leyden, Laidlaw, Jamieson, Hogg and others, to renew its ebbing current, is too familiar to bear repetition. With this band of literary antiquarians, it was not the search after some unreal mediaeval Utopia, but an attempt to restore a 'storied past,' chronologically and locally definite, felt as still coursing in their blood.* The tone of vigorous realism, which informs the mediaevalism of the Scottish School, characterises Scott's learned introduction to the *Minstrelsy*. In his researches into the real and concrete background of Border minstrelsy, he discovered several formative elements,—the Border turbulence 'knowing no measure of law

* "Scott himself was the descendant of a Border chief, Walter Scott of Harden whose wife was the celebrated Flower of Yarrow. The tradition of the 'feast of the spurs' is associated with her name. The clan Scott occupied a prominent place in Border history."—Morley's *Literature of the Georgian Era*, p. 203.

but the length of the sword,' the primitive notion of morality to which a freebooter was no thief, the clannishness and sense of personal honour, the scant respect for the church and its institutions, and last but not the least important as a formative factor, the body of superstitions about charms, consecrated wells, revenants, witchcraft, and ' sundry classes of subordinate spirits.' This last element of primitive mentality appears in Border balladry in the same way as it does in folk-poetry everywhere, which originally is one with and undifferentiated from communal life and institutions.

But the difference that romanticism made in the appraisement of this standing element of folk-poetry is pointed by the difference in the attitude towards it between Percy and Scott. The former seems to have been well aware of its existence, but, conceiving his work mainly as an illustrator of linguistic and literary history, he did not care to enlarge on this element in which probably his typical eighteenth-century mind also had scant interest. " The editor thought it incumbent on him," says he, " to insert some old pieces on the popular superstition concerning witches, hobgoblins, fairies and ghosts,"* and so he proceeds to introduce a few not inelegant pieces, none of which, however, is ballad poetry at all, and through Corbet's ' humorous old song ' waves a cheery farewell to the time-honoured ' superstitions of popular poetry.' But Border superstitions occupy considerable space in the introduction to the *Minstrelsy*, and their effect

* See Percy's note on the *Witches' Song* in Series III, Book the Second (*Reliques*, Everyman's Library, Vol. II, p. 311).

and expression in ballad poetry is prized as a feature of Border mediaevalism.

These materials of folk-poetry, which Percy brushes aside with derision and Scott includes in his work under the head, 'Romantic,' with the bias and sympathy of a romantic mind, are curiously transformed in their transmittance from ballad to romantic treatment. Percy, as we have seen, calls them baldly, and perhaps with the rationalistic accent of the century to which he belongs, 'the superstitions of popular poetry,' and a critical evaluation of them from the modern, as apart from the early nineteenth-century standpoint, decidedly lends support to Percy's view. They come into ballad poetry in the course of ballad art which is a thing of a special significance and character. It is an art of a largely unconscious, inchoate kind, going no deeper than the mere externals of form and expression and leaving intact the sense or feeling that lurks behind. This sense or feeling issues direct from life itself and not from any artistic mood or cultured mental attitude. Hence in the old ballads the slight sophistication produced by art scarcely represents, as in cultured poetry, any inner sophistication of feeling or thought. The specious supernaturalism of ballad poetry is produced by this 'ballad art,' which slips off and on into its tone, but always with an inevitability quite alien from any set artistic purpose or intentional artistic effect.

Thus in the *Twa Sisters*, the supernatural revelation of the crime comes as a sort of relief to emotional tension. Up to its supernatural sequel, the story brims with a dull pain as of unshed tears,

throbbing inly with the suppressed feeling that a life so lovely and young should be cut off by a sister's monstrous cruelty and the world should go on as usual none the wiser. When the feeling almost yearns and strains for expression, the balladist relieves the tension by making the harp made out of her dead body, or, as in a different and more poetic version, strung with three of her golden hairs, reveal the secret to the world. In the ballads which deal with the revenant motive, the dead coming for the quick, like *Sweet William's Ghost*, *Clerk Saunders*, *The Suffolk Miracle*, etc., it is the disquietude of unfulfilled passion on which the imaginative stress is laid. The dead lover cannot rest in the grave,—the yearning of the flesh stirs uneasily in the soul,—and naturally enough the barrier that the grave raises between the living and the dead has to burst and give way. Lastly, in the ballads that narrate the intercourse between human and fairy beings, as *Tamlane*, *Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight* and *Thomas Rhymer*, it is not the strangeness of such intercourse that is brought into prominence, but the play of passion or emotion that creates the weird or unearthly situation. The supernatural appears not *qua* supernatural, not as a wonder and mystery standing out apart from the other and more comprehensible incidents, but as an emotionally interesting feature in the balladist's outlook on the tragedy of human life. We have here the characteristic mediaeval attitude, already dealt with in the Introduction, in which the poet's imaginative sense of life is obviously undifferentiated from faith in the supernatural.

The distinction which Schiller drew between the 'naïve' and the 'sentimental,' between poets "who affect us through their nature, through sensuous truth, through living presence," and those "who affect us through ideas," comprehends exactly the distinction between what the romantic poets found in the ballads and legends and what they rendered back in a different way of imagination. They dissociate the supernatural incidents from the containing life-stuff, infuse into them a new kind of feeling and sensibility, and the 'idea' of the supernatural, or supernaturalism as we term it, is evolved as a distinct motive. The original interest is transformed and the superstitions issue in supernaturalism, lending its distinct streak of colour to the romantic vision of mediaeval life.

We shall find that, in both legendary poems and romantic narratives, in spite of a wide difference in artistic scope and dealing, there is an essential similarity in the conception and mode of treatment of the supernatural materials. The most distinctive common characteristic is that the mediaeval properties of the supernatural are not transmuted in its romantic re-conception, and without being mediaeval in mood or intention, the supernaturalism has a defined mediaevalistic character. The old superstitious associations are retained, though not in the same significance or implications, but for artistic purposes and ends. The concreteness of old legend remains, but it is infused with a new subjective sense of strangeness and remoteness or with a reminiscential quality. The palpability of supernatural forms, refined perhaps out of grosser medi-

aeval features of wonder, is touched only slightly and fitfully with the sense of mystery. Without actually producing the mediaeval supernatural, the legendary and narrative poets deliberately recall it by the quaint accents of ' grey-hair'd Eld ' preserved purposely in their undertone.

Section A

Legendary Poetry of the Scottish School

One of the immediate consequences, as noticed by Wordsworth, of Percy's *Reliques* was the poetic treatment of legends of a romantic or historical character in the framework of ballad poetry. Writing in 1815, when this species of poetry had gone completely out of literary vogue, Wordsworth remarked : " This work (Percy's *Reliques*) did not steal silently into the world, as is evident from the number of legendary tales that appeared not long after its publication and had been modelled, as the authors persuaded themselves, after the old ballad."* These ' legendary tales ' represented a new line of poetic composition and Scott distinguished them, significantly enough, though somewhat vaguely and slightly, from mere ballad imitations. He made a theoretical division in the intro-

* See *Essay supplementary to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (*Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 949).

duction to the *Minstrelsy* of the 'Modern Imitations,' which made one of the three sections of his work, into 'real imitations of old ballads' and 'legendary poems.' Scott implied by the distinction little more than a greater or less degree of freedom in handling the traditionary themes. But the formal distinction was due really to inner differences of intention and spirit.

The imitative ballad had, in fact, existed in English poetry long before Percy, and it flourished after him through a wide range of poetic quality from the crude efforts of some of the contributors to the *Minstrelsy*, through Leyden's and Jamieson's overlaboured productions, to 'the wonderful ease of mimicry' of Hogg whose *Queen's Wake* contains that masterpiece of fantastic eeriness touched with humour, the *Witch of Fife*,—a poem conceived, however, not romantically but in genuine ballad spirit. The misconceived aim of ballad imitation was to convert 'the poetry of folk' into 'the poetry of art,' and the fatuity of the aim is apparent to us from our modern critical knowledge of ballad origins and their organic relation to the ballad form.* The peculiar tints of ballad poetry, as we are well aware, belong to the soil and decay rapidly when plucked away from it and set in the atmosphere of cultured

* "In short, the traditional ballad appears to be inimitable by any person of literary cultivation, and we may well feel grateful to those poets and poetasters who have tried their hands at it, for their invariable failure is one of the strongest proofs—amounting almost to demonstration—that there is a difference between 'the poetry of folk' and 'the poetry of art.'—Kittredge's Introduction to *Child's English and Scottish Ballads*, Student's Cambridge Ed., p. xxix.

sensibility. Outside what Ten Brink calls the 'ballad-making age,' when reminiscence and improvisation were helped on by the choral dance and the communal mentality, it could be recommenced only as an intellectual *tour de force*. This foreordained futility did not afflict what Scott calls legendary poetry. We shall observe presently how the legend itself in the hands of the Scottish poets becomes more and more a mere nucleus for the accretion of imaginative materials and the interest shifts on from the story to the imaginative rendering. On the relaxation of the balladist's intentness on the theme resulting from it, Scott seems to have grounded the distinctive characteristic of legendary poetry.*

* The distinction between imitative ballads and legendary poems is first pointed out by Scott in the introduction to the *Minstrelsy*. "I may, however, hint at the difference," says Scott, "not always attended to, betwixt legendary poems and real imitations of the old ballad; the reader will find specimens of both in the modern part of this collection." He cites, as illustrative of the difference, his own poems, *Glenfinlas* (legendary poem) and the *Eve of St. John* (ballad). The difference between the two poems, however, is really one of form,—the first being a somewhat elaborately developed story artistically conceived and treated, the second more akin to the ballad manner, retaining the simplicity and straightforwardness of an old ballad. Scott returned to the distinction later in his observations on modern imitations of popular poetry. "Two classes of imitation," remarks Scott, "may be referred to as belonging to this species of composition. When they approach each other, there may be some difficulty in assigning to individual poems their peculiar character, but in general the difference is distinctly marked. The distinction lies between the authors of ballads or legendary poems, who have attempted to imitate the language, the manners, and the sentiments of the ancient poems which were their prototypes; and those, on the contrary, who, without endeavouring to do so, have struck out a particular path for themselves, which cannot with strict propriety be termed either ancient or modern." (See *Scott's Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 557.)

Even within the old poetic frame, we observe the strainings for escape from the strait-laced ballad manner towards a presentation and effect wholly alien from the ballad spirit. They are well illustrated by Mickle's studied efforts to thrill and evoke emotional response, Leyden's careful compounding of a thick atmosphere of spells and wizardries, Scott's stressing of ghastly details for the cumulative effect of horror. The legendary poems, in these distinctive notes, represent a real creative effort of romantic imagination dealing with traditionary supernatural materials, as opposed to the studied principle of archaism in the imitative ballad.

Mickle

Mickle was a forerunner of the school and his poems appeared anonymously in Evans's *Old Ballads* published in 1777. His admiration for Spenser led him on one hand to join in the favourite eighteenth-century game of Spenserian imitation and on the other to employ Spenser's trick of pseudo-archaism in his poems in the ballad form. But most of his ballads, though disguised by their studied archaism, are in the nature of legendary poetry. Scott, who was an admirer of Mickle, criticised him for his efforts to keep up ' a fashion of antiquity,' which, in Scott's words, was as futile as ' sticking niches, turrets and tracery of plaster upon a modern front.'*

* See *Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry* (*Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 548).

The Sorceress, perhaps the best of Mickle's ballads, deals with a legend of primitive witchcraft. The descriptions of the witch and her den are in the slow circumstantial manner of his favourite poet Spenser. But descriptive touches conceived in a different vein also occur, *e.g.*,

> "Eyeless, a huge and starved toad sat
> In corner murk aloof."

And

> "A fox and vulture's skeletons
> A yawning rift betrayed,
> And grappling still each other's bones
> The strife of death displayed."

The magic arts of the sorceress, by which she reveals to the Saxon maid the tragic fate of her beloved, are described with a certain effect of weird horror. A stronger legendary supernatural strain appears in *Cumnor Hall*, which has for its theme the violent and mysterious death of Amy Robsart, the Countess of Leicester, at Cumnor Hall. Between the concluding chapter of *Kenilworth* and Mickle's poem on which Scott's narrative is based, there is a difference in dealing with the supernatural circumstances. Scott cuts out the mystery that surrounds the end of the countess in Mickle's poem and brings about her end by the villainous mechanical device of Varney. But Mickle retains all the supernatural thrill and achieves an imaginative effect which Scott destroys by employing the Radcliffean explanatory device ridiculed by him elsewhere as that of Snug the joiner.

The countess, lamenting her fate, has strange premonitions of death. On the fatal night, piercing screams and cries of mortal fear ring through the dreary loneliness of Cumnor Hall; the death-bell rings thrice; an aerial voice calls; the raven thrice flaps his wings around the towers; the mastiff howls; the oaks are shattered on the green,—and the countess is seen no more. The castle thereafter remains haunted by spirits and

> "The village maids, with fearful glance,
> Avoid the ancient moss-grown wall;"

Mickle has not sufficient concentrative power of imagination to marshal his 'horrors' towards a cumulative effect. But his poems point to the tendency to over-emphasis of supernatural horror which was soon to overtake poetry of this class under German influence.*

Leyden

Of the succeeding school of professed romanticists and literary antiquarians organised by Scott, Leyden was a prominent figure, aiding the cause, as Scott says of him, 'with many-languaged lore.'† Though he tried many kinds of poetry, he succeeded best in the ballads which were contributed to Scott's *Minstrelsy*. His vigour and originality save him

* See Part III of the present work.

† "Though Leyden aids, alas! no more
My cause with many-languaged lore."
——*Marmion*, Intro. to Canto Sixth.

from the fatuity of lifeless imitation and, as Prof. Elton says, he produces the legendary poem even when he tries to imitate the ballad.*

Lord Soulis is a legendary narrative of the career of the famous wizard of that name, who, according to mediaeval Scottish legends, held the haunted castle of Hermitage. He is described as having a number of evil spirits in his employ and the secret of his death is hidden in a strong padlocked chest. Emboldened by the protection promised to him by his familiar, 'old Redcap Sly,' he proceeds boldly from crime to crime until his nemesis starts with the capture of the heir of Branxholm. Although the poem deliberately copies the ballad manner in the directness of its beginning, its digression on the 'black spae-book' of Lord Soulis, and its general manner of conducting the narrative, its difference lies in the art with which the atmosphere of wizardry and necromancy is palpably created round the villainous hero. But there is something studied and laboured in Leyden's art which is the polar opposite of the spontaneity of genuine ballad. *The Court of Keeldar* is a companion piece to the former and is in the same vein. It deals with the legend of the encounter of the chief of Keeldar with Lord Soulis at the Hermitage Castle, in which the men of Keeldar, though guarded with magical herbs and arms against Soulis's sorcery, are placed under enchantment and the chief himself is drowned at the suggestion of the Wee Brown Man, a fairy of a malignant order. *The Mermaid* harks back to the

* *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), Vol. I, p. 306.

old ballad motive of intercourse between a human and a supernatural creature. The story, as Scott informs us in the introduction, is founded on a traditional Gaelic ballad dealing with a sailors' legend of a love-lorn mermaid wailing in the ocean cave. But, though there is a good deal of sentiment in the poem, there is little of the charm or mystery associated with Gaelic legends. Yet a few descriptive touches seem to catch a sort of glamour as in the stanzas of somewhat overdone description of the descent of the chief into the mermaid's cavern.

Jamieson and Morritt

Minor contributors to the *Minstrelsy* like Jamieson and Morritt call for a passing notice. Jamieson was more a linguist and antiquarian than a poet. He holds an important place in the history of the ballad revival, for the comparative study of ballads receives its first impulse from his translations from the Danish in his *Popular Ballads and Songs*. His poem on *The Water Kelpie* is a purely descriptive one, in which there is a considerable accumulation of details gathered from an intimate acquaintance with current superstitions, but not welded together into an imaginative whole. The antiquarian nature of his inspiration is all too evident. Morritt's *Curse of Moy* is a poetic version, conceived with some power of imagination, of a grim legend connected with the castle of Moy. Margaret, a woman wronged sixty years ago by a chief of Moy, lives on a wild height near

the castle and comes down to pronounce the curse of death on the new-born heir of the house and returns to her mountain hut, waiting for the next chance of revenge. The poem concludes in the usual legendary tone :

" And long in Moy's devoted tower
Shall Marg'ret's gloomy curse prevail;
And mothers in the child-bed hour,
Shall shudder to think on the witch's tale."

Scott

Scott's own contributions to legendary poetry are few and belong to the earliest of the three well-marked divisions of his literary career.

Except two poems on Thomas the Rhymer,* of which only the one describing the final disappearance of Thomas into the land of faery, led by the sign of the Hart and Hind, is wholly of Scott's composition, his legendary poems are differentiated from those of his contemporaries by evident marks of the

* Scott produced a sort of ' ballad triology ' on Thomas the Rhymer, legends about whom flit with a ghostly sort of fascination through the ancient history of Scotland. The first part was an ancient ballad narrating the episode of Thomas's entry into fairy land in the Fairy Queen's company; the second was made by Scott himself out of prophecies attributed to Thomas, showing him as a prophet come back, after his seven years' stay in fairyland, with a store of prophetic lore; the third was composed wholly by Scott, describing the final disappearance of Thomas into fairyland. The three poems were to set forth the three leading episodes of the career of Thomas the Rhymer.

new German influence that started from Mackenzie's lecture on the German Drama to the Royal Society of Edinburgh on 21st April, 1788. Scott had steeped himself in German studies, translations and imitations before he came to original work in the line of legendary poetry. His legendary poems form a link, as it were, between the earlier type developed by Scottish poets and the later informed by German 'horror-romanticism.' On account of their difference in motive, tone and imaginative effect, Scott's legendary poems will be dealt with in relation to the development of the horror-motive in romantic poetry.*

The distinction between the earlier and the later type of legendary poetry is clear and outstanding. To the Scottish poets who form a well-defined group, the supernatural interest is interpenetrated and vitalised by 'localised romance.' Through legends clinging to ancient places or mediaeval figures and objects, they intend to charm and inveigle the imagination back into the superstitious atmosphere of those times. Scott's *Eve of St. John*, for instance, dominated as it is by the same horror-motive as Southey's romantic legendary poems, *Rudiger*, *Donica* and *Lord William*, has nothing of the vagueness of landscape or uncertainty of time characterising the latter. Definite and recognisable objects or events are referred to in the poem,—Dryburgh Abbey, the 'black rood' of Melrose, the Eildon Tree, the battle of Ancram Moor. The poet

* See Part III.

in these intentional references seeks the aid of a sense of local colour or of chronologically definite mediaeval background. Hence the effect of the supernatural incidents on the imagination tends to shade off into a romantic feeling for the mediaeval, and the effect is intensified by a sense of the wildly and inexplicably tragic, inherent in the incertitudes of an incomprehensibly lawless time.

The ballad form, however, which for the Scottish poets had the lure of traditional folk-poetry and its native unspoilt vigour, laboured in hands less masterly than Coleridge's under disabilities as an art-form. Its maximum expansion may be seen in Scott's *Alice Brand** where the elfin world is presented against a human background of love and tragedy, with a variety of situations and episodes which lead to the final stroke of dramatic surprise linking up the elfin life with the human. But in most poems of the type such artistic complexity is barred by the restricted range and scope of the poetic form, the effect being confined to a sole situation or occurrence usually of terror or horror. The local colour, on which the situation developed in the poem must depend for its vividness or fullness of effect, is bound in the hands of poets, not in touch like Scott and his fellow-poets with local traditions, to become neutral and ineffective. Too definite locali-

* The poem, inset in Canto IV of the *Lady of the Lake*, is not an original one, but an English version from Danish. Scott says in the note : " This little fairy-tale is founded upon a very curious Danish ballad which occurs in *Kaempe Viser*, a collection of heroic songs, first published in 1591, and reprinted in 1695." (See *Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., pp. 246-47).

sation on the other hand of supernatural incidents must result in the exclusion of a quality, the subtle appeal of which may be tested by the difference in imaginative impressiveness between the looming midnight castle of the first part of *Christabel* and the real and localised feudal keep of the second.

The decline of legendary poetry, which, outside the Scottish group, had been yielding wholly different artistic effects in the dimming of 'localised romance' and mediaeval background, was really due not so much to hostile criticism, as Wordsworth supposed,* as to exhaustion of artistic vitality. Encumbered with traditional and conventional forms of supernaturalism, its difference from the old supernatural ballad became like 'the difference between live metaphor and dead personification.' The orthodox supernaturalism of legendary poetry in its late decline seems to go wandering like a lost spirit through Campbell's poems,—*O'Connor's Child* (a sister's curse and the apparition of a dead lover), *Lochiel's Warning* (wizardly visions and premonitions of disaster), *The Spectre Boat* (the dead woman appearing in a blue shroud to ferry the false lover to the land of the dead) and *The Death-Boat of Heligoland* (the martyred dead rising by night and ploughing the night-surge in a spectral boat). But supernatural legendary poetry became afterwards so effete and obsolete as almost to invite the caricatures of Hood in several pieces of his *Whims and Oddities* published in 1826 and 1827.

* See *Essay supplementary to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (*Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 949).

Section B

The Legendary Supernatural in Romantic Narrative

A fresh development of poetic form, in which the supernatural elements are employed more fluidly and expansively to various artistic ends and imaginative effects, is represented by Coleridge's *Christabel* and Scott's series of romantic narratives. But while Scott comes to the romantic narrative straight from legendary poetry,—his first effort in this direction, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, being as a matter of fact only the expansion of a poetic conception in the old line,*—Coleridge gives to it a new turn, making its concrete and objective form a highly rarefied medium for supernatural effects of an entirely different kind. From the point of view of supernatural treatment, no two poetic personalities are more keenly contrasted than Coleridge and Scott. Their difference which is so easy for us to detect in the historical perspective was, however, prominent enough to strike even their contemporaries. When a fragment of Scott's *Bridal of Triermain* was published anonymously in 1809, the question was mooted whether it was an

* The history of the composition of the *Lay* is given by Scott himself in his introduction to the edition of 1830. "An aged gentleman of property communicated to her ladyship the story of Gilpin Horner.....The young Countess (of Dalkeith).....enjoined on me as a task to compose a ballad on the subject." The contemplated ballad grew into the full narrative poem.

imitation of Scott or of Coleridge.* The doubting attitude, as we shall see later, was natural, for the poem represents a distinct departure from Scott's usual manner towards that of Coleridge. This palpable difference between the manner of Coleridge and that of Scott is largely accounted for by the fact that the influence of legendary poetry hung heavily round the latter when he passed into the realm ot narrative poetry. Apart from inset legendary poems, we may observe how many are the supernatural legends that remain in solution in his lays and tales. We have Gilpin Horner and Michael Scott in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the Goblin Hall in *Marmion*, Brian's parentage and the Taghairm in the *Lady of the Lake*, the Vault of Destiny in the *Vision of Don Roderick*, the haunted dell of Greta in *Rokeby*, the mystic light from the turrets of Brodick Castle in the *Lord of the Isles*, the Castle of the Seven Shields in *Harold the Dauntless*,— each of which contains the germ or the theme of a legendary poem.

* This appears from a reference in an article in Blackwood's Magazine, April, 1817, an excerpt from which is quoted in *Scott's Poetical Works*, Edinburgh Ed., p. 402: "With regard to this poem we have often heard, from what may be deemed good authority, a very curious anecdote.....When the article entitled 'The Inference of Altisidora' appeared in the Edinburgh Annual Register for 1809, it will be remembered that the last fragment contained in that singular production was the beginning of the romance of Triermain. Report says that the fragment was not meant to be an imitation of Scott, but of Coleridge: and that, for this purpose, the author borrowed both the name of the hero and the scene from the then unpublished poem of Christabelle; and further, that so few had ever seen the manuscript of that poem, that amongst these few the author of Triermain could not be mistaken."

The romantic narrative, as it evolves out of legendary poetry, inherits from it certain stereotyped supernatural conceptions which linger on traditionally even into the more finely conceived supernaturalism of Coleridge.

The Hermitage, Cumnor Hall, Cadyow Castle, etc., that loom so large in Border ballads and figure in the legendary poetry of the Scottish school, are the real prototypes of the enchanted or haunted castles in or round which the action of the romantic narrative is often laid. But the type is developed by descriptive art and is sometimes expanded through connections with some religious edifice like Melrose Abbey in the *Lay* or Hilda's convent in *Marmion*. Branksome Tower, Norham's castle, the Island Castle, the buried castle in St. John's valley, and Sir Leoline's castle are conceptions shadowed forth from legendary poetry. Again, the sequestered and haunted localities that lurk in the scenic backgrounds of the narratives, like the Goblin Cave in the *Lady of the Lake*, the Haunted Dell in *Rokeby*, Margaret's Bower in the *Lay*, and the haunted forest in *Christabel*, may have the same literary origin.

The minstrel with the power of prophetic vision, an outstanding figure in legendary poetry, is reproduced with but slight variations in Allan Bane in the *Lady of the Lake* and Bracy the Bard in *Christabel*. The magic book of Michael Scott seems to come into the *Lay* re-edited from the 'black spae-book' of Lord Soulis described by Leyden,—the Scottish 'spae-book' itself being perhaps the vulgar version of the more imposing

'Grimoire' of the French romances. The magic lore of the 'ladie' of Branksome, the spell of Lady Geraldine and the sorcery of Jutta are traditional legendary conceptions which reveal their essentially popular character by comparison with the solemn spell of Merlin, coming straight out of Arthurian romance, in the *Bridal of Triermain*.

The uncouth and grotesque creatures of superstition, that appear as agents of supernatural action in legendary poetry, stray into some of the romantic narratives. But their grossness is more or less refined by the poet's art until they curiously suggest, without actually presenting, the forms of superstitious conception. The Goblin Page in the *Lay* springs from the race of Bogles or Goblins noticed by Scott in the Introduction to the *Minstrelsy* among the creatures of Border superstition. The Mountain Spirit and the River Spirit in the same poem really belong to that species of spirits to whom in the Highlands, as Scott says, "is ascribed the guardianship or the superintendence of a particular clan or family of distinction." Even Coleridge's Lady Geraldine has a link of kinship with the sinister elf-women of ballads and legends who tempt their human victims into strange calamities. In these various conceptions we find different degrees of refinement made by the poet's imagination working upon the transmitted raw materials.

The refining process of art is seen at work on the somewhat intractable substance of the legendary supernatural. In the first place, we observe that the narrative poets do not employ the grosser forms

of folk-tales and folk-lore which appear in legendary poetry mostly unmodified, though perhaps enriched with decorative trappings. But the elementary feeling, of which these folk-superstitions are outgrowths, is sought to be captured in its intuitive stage as it were, and the feeling is diffused over a situation or a character. This rarefied artistic dealing with superstitions may be sampled in the midnight intercourse of the Elemental Spirits in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and in the conception of the character of Brian the Hermit in the *Lady of the Lake*. The concrete forms of superstition lose their hardness and definiteness and are sublimated, as it were, into a mere felt presence, mixed with the effects of solitude, moonlight or wildness of natural scenery. The result is a certain fineness of weird effect, achieved by a simultaneous thrill to many strings of imaginative sensibility.

In the second place, we may notice how a finer effect is produced by the transfusion of the romantic 'enchantment of distance' in the presentation of the supernatural, though the art by which it is produced is apt to vary with the poet's individual genius. Scott in the *Lay* seeks it by the obvious and obtrusive method of putting the story in the mouth of the old forlorn minstrel of other days, re-risen out of a forgotten past, and in the *Lady of the Lake* by invoking the magic Harp of the North from the ivied witch-elm. Coleridge adopts the more effectively artistic method of introducing subtle hints to the imagination like the spell of Jesu Maria in *Christabel* and the cross-bow in the *Ancient Mariner*, seeming thus to hold a door ajar

on the fascinating strangeness and uncouth charm of the vanished mediaeval world. Wordsworth, in the *White Doe of Rylstone*, employs, as we shall see, a still more subtle and exquisite art to produce the same enchantment which is made at the same time to serve an essential artistic purpose in the narrative. This sense of perspective, showing the supernatural figures and action as a marvellous shadow-show in the distance, is not possible to achieve where a situation or incident is taken out of some old legend and presented in striking life-likeness for immediate imaginative effect, which constitutes all the art of the Scottish legendary poets.

Romantic Narrative Poetry

The presentation of the supernatural in set and concrete forms,—bloody apparitions, lurking fiends, haunted castles, devices of witchcraft, omens, spells, transformations, sepulchral voices,—tends inveterately to stereotype itself. So long as supernaturalism confined itself to variations on such jaded, conventional themes, the chance of any inner imaginative development was obviously restricted. But in the larger scope of narrative poetry, the mere sensation of terror or wonder not being the main motive, the supernatural elements are used to widely various artistic ends. Even in Scott's romantic narratives, which lie so largely under the influence of legendary poetry, the supernatural is employed, as we shall presently observe, with remarkable plasticity and freedom. It may

serve the purpose of machinery ; it may flit at will through the narrative, lending colour,—local, historical or purely imaginative,—or provide the main motive of romance. We shall see how its possibilities are indefinitely extended,—how subtly and delicately it can be introduced by Wordsworth in the one single poem in which he follows the line of Scott, converting the wonder of it into a ray of transfiguring visionary light, and how finely and lightly it can be turned by Moore in his oriental romance into a chord of music in a symphony of passion and pleasure. The supernatural conception thus becomes a highly plastic material capable of being re-fashioned and remoulded for novel aesthetic effects.

Scott as a Narrative Poet

With that spirit of robust realism which characterises the Scottish mediaevalists as a school, allied to an impassioned imagination, Scott seized on the real side of mediaeval life,—its martial trappings, its chivalry of deeds and manners, its strange proneness alike to religion and pagan superstition. His aim and purpose as a narrative poet was to reconstruct with clear historic vision this outer aspect of mediaevalism, and the clue to the part played in it by supernatural agencies and superstitious beliefs was provided to him by mediaeval romances and legends. The supernatural thus comes into his narrative poetry solely through its associations, literary or legendary and traditional, with the life that he imagines of the Middle Ages

and feudal society. But his artistic treatment of this element from the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* to the *Bridal of Triermain* has subtle shades of variety and distinction.

In *Marmion*, *Rokeby* and the *Lord of the Isles*, the interest centres really in stirring historical events and the supernatural elements are employed either as machinery to bring about an intended situation or simply to accompany a situation in order to heighten its imaginative effect. In the first, the encounter between Marmion and De Wilton is brought about through the effect on Marmion's fancy of the Host's strange tale of the encounter near the Goblin Hall between King Alexander and the Elfin Knight; in the second, the excitement of a superstitious feeling forces the criminal Bertram to a confession which leads to a fight between him and Wilfred; in the third, the mystic light from Brodick Castle appears mysteriously to mark the most central event of the story, *viz.*, the return of Bruce to Scotland. To these may be added the *Vision of Don Roderick*, in which the Vault of Destiny is used as a crude mechanical device to unfold the history of Spain. In these poems the treatment of the supernatural is purely incidental and unrelated to the main poetic motive.

But the supernatural is most amply used by Scott for the purpose of colouring, calculated to impart vividness and verisimilitude to his large-canvas pictures of mediaeval life and times in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Harold the Dauntless* and the *Lady of the Lake*. In each of these poems the treatment of the supernatural develops special

qualities and characteristics calling for separate critical notice.

Lay of the Last Minstrel.—In this poem, the supernaturalism not only dyes the substance of the tale, but conveys also a subsidiary tone of literary reminiscence, recalling the romantic elements and their characteristic presentment in the old minstrel lays to which the poem harks back. But the poet's narrative manner being dictated by the idea of the 'freedom' of 'romantic' or minstrel poetry,* no attempt is made to weld together the different supernatural parts of the poem, *viz.*, (*i*) the magic lore of the Lady, (*ii*) the incidents connected with the Goblin Page, and (*iii*) the omens delivered by the Elemental Spirits. Besides, the tendency of mystery to appear and disappear,—a besetting

* "According to the author's idea of Romantic Poetry as distinguished from Epic, the former comprehends a fictitious narrative, framed and combined at the pleasure of the writer; beginning and ending as he may judge best; which neither exacts nor refuses the use of supernatural machinery; which is free from the technical rules of the Epee; and is subject only to those which good sense, good taste and good morals apply to every species of poetry without exception." —Preface to the First Edition of the *Bridal of Triermain* (see *Scott's Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 375). In the introductory verses to Canto V of *Marmion*, the poet compares his narrative art to the Gothic art of window-painting :

"The Bard shall scorn pedantic laws;
And, as the ancient art could stain
Achievements on the storied pane,
Irregularly traced and planned,
.....
So shall he strive, in changeful hue,
Field, feast, and combat, to renew,
And loves, and arms, and harper's glee,
And all the pomp of chivalry." (ll. 183-91).

tendency with Scott,—leads to a certain weakness and incongruity of impression.

It is suggested in the opening verse that in the Lady's magic lore there is something sinister and deadly, and to leave its character and contents in unexplored vagueness would have been the best way of deepening its effect on the mind. But the poet tells us presently how this magic lore was acquired from Margaret's wizard father and imparted to the Lady, the wizard's wife, whereby she developed the powers of controlling ' the viewless forms of air ' and understanding the language of Spirits. The reader is next informed of the material source of this magic lore,—a book of ' Grimoire ' which lies buried in the grave of Michael Scott in the abbey of Melrose. The whole history of Michael Scott and his book,—a real book of characteristic mediaeval binding, ' with iron clasp'd and with iron bound,'—is recounted, and even part of the contents of the ' mighty book ' is disclosed :

" It had much of glamour might,
Could make a ladye seem a knight;
The cobwebs on a dungeon wall
Seem tapestry in lordly hall;
A nutshell seem a gilded barge,
A sheeling seem a palace large,
And youth seem age, and age seem youth—
All was delusion, nought was truth."

(Canto III, st. ix)

Nothing was better calculated to destroy the mystery of the ' Book of Might ' than this recital of a part

of its contents which reads somewhat like drawing-room magic, and when the Book vanishes out of the possession of the Goblin Page, our interest in it vanishes too. The supernatural powers of the lady also are employed to such natural effects as healing the wounded Deloraine, and we are duly informed by the prolocutor that 'she wrought not by forbidden spell.' The best of her magic seems to be the white magic of leechcraft with nothing at all about it 'deadly to hear and deadly to tell.'

The Goblin Page, designed to be a figure of central interest in the original intention of the poem, ends by becoming, as Jeffrey calls him, an 'ungraceful intruder.'* His supernatural character and origin are emphasised by his incantatory mutterings which Scott borrowed from the legend and tried to improve upon in the account of his final disapperance, for in the legend, as Scott gives it in an appendix,† the cry of 'Found, Found, Found' does not occur. What, however, is interesting to notice is that the addition made by Scott tends somewhat to dissipate the mystery of the Goblin, for the meaning of the incantations becomes readily intelligible thereby,—the Goblin, lost to

* "We entreat Mr. Scott to enquire into the grounds of this suspicion, and to take advantage of any decent pretext he can lay hold of for purging the Lay of this ungraceful intruder." (See *Essays on English Poets and Poetry from the Edinburgh Review by Jeffrey*, New Universal Library, Routledge, p. 245.)

† See Scott's Note 'R' in which the story of Gilpin Horner is given. The goblin's cry was 'Tint (lost)! Tint! Tint!' which Scott supplements in the poem with the cry of 'Found, Found, Found' in Canto VI, st. 24.

his native elfin world, regaining it at long last through the supernatural aid of Michael Scott.*

In the omens also, delivered by the Spirits of the Flood and Fell, there is a certain lack of impressiveness and mystery. The incident of the midnight intercourse of the spirits is conceived in a vein of pathetic and wistful beauty. The night-long vigil of the anxious guardian spirits, their tranquil and deep-felt sympathy contrasting with the tripping morrice of the care-free elves, their helpless puzzling over the decree of the twinkling stars,—all tend to contribute to a total imaginative effect. Only the omens seem too transparent and make the reader wish that they were couched in mystic language more in keeping with the characters of the speakers. The only derogation from the complete aesthetic effect of the conception is, perhaps, that the whispered colloquy should be so loud as to make the ban-dogs bay and howl, the startled owl whoop from the turret and both squire and knight swear that a storm was near. The awful and tremendous loudness of it seems to suggest physical magnification not in keeping with the fineness of the conception, for, in the presentation of the Elemental Spirits at any rate, Scott refrains from concretising the supernatural: the spirits calling to each other at the dead hour of night remain bodiless and viewless, immanent in the river and the mountain, and Jeffrey's 'Quo Warranto' is powerless against them.†

* See Canto VI, sts. 24-26.

† "We would also move for a Quo Warranto against the Spirits of the River and the Mountain; for though they come of a very high

Harold the Dauntless.—A difference in supernatural colour is sensibly felt between the *Lay* and *Harold*. The substance of the *Lay* belongs to the mediaeval period, while the story of *Harold* to an age much earlier and ruder, when Christian culture just touched the fringes of pagan savagery. Accordingly in the latter poem we seem to stand close to the spirit of northern pagan mythology and the sombre mentality of fear and apprehension from unknown forces of Nature out of which this mythology itself was evolved. The rugged stamp of primitive thought and feeling is somewhat carefully impressed on the whole story. But by a lapse of the poet's art, the adventure of the Castle of the Seven Shields, savouring too much of mediaeval chivalry and romance, to which the action of the poem is anterior, is somewhat incongruously introduced into a world of pagan barbarism. We may leave out of account the minor anachronisms which do not so seriously disturb the general atmosphere of the story.

The supernaturalism of the poem is meant to be in keeping with this pagan atmosphere. It is gloomy, sinister, fearful. There is none of the comparatively light dealing with the supernatural that characterises the *Lay*, but in its place the dread intercourse between Jutta the sorceress, with her terrible ominous eye, and the master-demon

lineage, we do not know what lawful business they could have at Branksome Castle in the year 1550." (See *Essays on English Poets and Poetry from the Edinburgh Review by Jeffrey*, New Universal Library, Routledge, p. 245.)

Zernebock of the Deep Voice. The supernaturalism is strongly tinged with witchcraft and sorcery and tends to shade off into mythology, verging even on the grotesque in the episode of Harold's encounter with Odin. The poem as a whole is neither well-concerted nor artistically rounded off, and the supernatural elements also seem to be dragged in helter-skelter to heighten the colour of the age against which, however, the Castle of the Seven Shields stands out in curious disharmony.

The Lady of the Lake.—The paganism, which imbrues *Harold the Dauntless* so deeply, just touches and colours fitfully the treatment of the supernatural in this poem. The interest of the poem depends almost entirely on the story, and the supernatural elements, which cluster round the strange figure of Brian the Hermit and the rites of the Fiery Cross, are subordinated to the main interest and are not introduced independently as in the two previous poems. But they serve nonetheless the same purpose of imaginative colouring.

Brian the hermit is the most weird creation of Scott's imagination. He is of mysterious lineage, brought up by a wild pagan mother. A savage moodiness, inherited from his unknown father, runs riot in his blood. Estranged in boyhood from sympathy and joy, he seeks :

> " .....in mist and meteor fire,
> To meet and know his Phantom Sire."
>
> (Canto III, st. vi)

The fever of his mind is not allayed, even when he grows up, by the proffered consolation of Christianity and he reads eagerly in ' magic, cabala and spell,'—

> " Till, with fired brain and nerves o'erstrung,
> And heart with mystic horrors wrung,
> Desperate he sought Benharrow's den,
> And hid him from the haunts of men."
>
> (*Ibid*)

Wild visions haunt him in the desert,—of river and mountain demons, noontide hags and grim goblins,—and the voices of the slain on the ' battle-heaths ' of the future. He naturally qualifies as a minister of supernatural rites and is approached for aid by the rebel Roderick Dhu. The terrible Druidical rites performed by Brian, preliminary to the sending of the Cross of Fire circling ' over den, glen and valley, down and moor,' are described with striking imaginative power and form a fitting prelude to the coming storm of the clansmen's fore-gathering and their multitudinous march to the muster-place at Lanrick mead.

Somewhat in contrast with the wild, cruel, half-pagan hermit, stands the old, sentimental visionary minstrel Allan Bane. The savagery of Brian contrasts well with the tenderness of Allan Bane who exercises guardianship over the Lady of the Lake, a happy, guileless child of nature, yet touched a little with ' the indignant spirit of the North.' Allan Bane's prophetic harp is a tender sensitive living thing that trembles in woful

sympathy for the coming sorrows of men. Says Allan Bane :

> " I touch the chords of joy, but low
> And mournful answer notes of woe;
> And the proud march, which victors tread,
> Sinks in the wailing for the dead."
>
> (Canto II, st. vii)

Like all old minstrels of legend and tradition, he has the power of vision and prophecy and interpretation of omens. He reads the significance of the omen of the fairy battle-brand that

> " Did, self-unscabbarded, foreshow
> The footsteps of a secret foe."
>
> (Canto II, st. xv)

The contrasted figures of the Hermit and the Minstrel, with their different supernatural associations, stand out strongly in the poem.

Free supernatural touches also are introduced throughout the narrative, which are calculated not only to remind us that the story moves in a superstitious age, but also to suggest subtly the fear and uncertainty hedging round human life in the wild lawlessness of the time. The king, in the disguise of Fitz-James, sleeping peacefully in the woodland castle, dreams of Fair Ellen, but the happy dream is suddenly crossed by the startling transformation of the maid into her fierce spectral ancestor :

> " He sought her yielded hand to clasp,
> And a gold gauntlet met his grasp :

The phantom's sex was changed and gone,
Upon its head a helmet shone;
Slowly enlarged to giant size,
With darken'd cheek and threatening eyes,
The grisly visage, stern and hoar,
To Ellen still a likeness bore."

(Canto I, st. xxxiv)

—impressing on the king's mind, when he awakes, her fearful Douglas lineage. The shadow of revenge, cruelty, bloodshed and foray seems to frown over the hours of both sleep and waking, and, making a solemn background to the dangerous uncertainties of human life, loom the purple mountains, the Highland lakes and gloomy woodlands sheltering within their depths a haunted 'goblin cave.'

The Bridal of Triermain.—In this poem the supernatural is not machinery, colour or accessory matter, but the motive of high romance. The narrative turns on the beautiful Arthurian legend of the awakening from charmed sleep of Arthur's child, Gyneth, bound in Merlin's spell in the magic castle of the valley of St. John. In this poem Scott turns from 'Border spell' to a different poetic motive,—to the romance, more remote :

"Of errant knight, and damozelle;
Of the dread knot a Wizard tied,
In punishment of maiden's pride"

(Intro. st. viii)

It is pitched in a different key. The subdued note of magic and enchantment is struck instead of Scott's customary martial note.

The poem is a clear departure from the usual manner of Scott towards a new strain. In the very conception of the story, which resolves itself into two parts,—the romantic history of 'Arthur's child, bound in Merlin's spell,' and Sir Roland's feverish quest after her,—there is one of the secret, but potent charms of romanticism dealing with the mediaeval,—the charm of a dreamy remoteness, of a vision sliding back through the long vista of time, of the insinuating call of the forgotten far-away past. The princess, sleeping the lonely sleep of centuries, seems to gather round her, as a sort of solating atmosphere, the ineffable charm evolved by the slow passage of time. In the mysterious depths of the buried castle, the silent centuries remain frozen in a still spell-bound atmosphere.

So Lyulph's old-world tale acts with the subtle effect of an incantation on the imagination: it uprears like an Amphion-like tune the whole phantom fabric of Sir Ronald's romance,—the buried castle, the eager quest and mysterious adventures, the spell-bound princess and the sudden awakening out of charmed sleep. The flitting vision of the lost maid, recurring in many a warrior's dream, and the shadowy figure of the castle coming and going in the gloaming seem to acquire, after Lyulph's tale is told, a troublous glamour and fascination, ——as of ghostly dream-appearances of persons long dead and events long gone by and forgotten.

But the note of high romance in the poem is weakened here and there by relapses into Scott's inevitable matter-of-fact and accustomed 'Borderism,' as for instance, the opening of the last canto and the conclusion. The note of Byronic satire in the introductory portions, which runs independently, sends at least one discordant echo into the enchanted atmosphere of the story. The Baron's banter to the maidens inside the buried castle who hold out the rich presents to him :

> " Bid your streams of gold expand
> O'er proud London's thirsty land."
>
> (Canto III, st. xxvii)

comes with a shattering shock of reality and anachronism. Such lapses of art derogate from the complete aesthetic effect of the poem.

The character of the heroine Gyneth, sketched in her one single appearance in Arthur's lists, bears strangely crossed hereditary lineaments. The royal pride and generous sympathy of the great-hearted Arthur and the sinister, subtle cruelty of her half-human Circean mother mix wildly in her blood. When she refuses the boon, 'chaffer'd down and limited, debased and narrow'd' through the king's concern for the lives of his knights, and demands as arbitress at the lists either power of life and death over the champions or none, the noble pride of Pandragon's race seems to speak through the bold demand. But it takes a sinister, tigress-like turn as spears draw blood and swords strike flame. The lust of cruelty rises like a suppressed tide in her blood,—the strain of Guendolen in her, ——and she keeps tight hold on the warder until

benumbed by Merlin's spell. She is altogether a fine, delicate, exotic flower, but with a dark drop of poisonous juice at the core, and she is doomed to sleep off this poison in her blood in the charmed subterranean sleep of six long forgetful centuries.

For this strange flower, born of passion and enchantment, the yearning of the Baron of Triermain is equally strange and ' unhomelike.' It seems almost to typify the romantic soul's yearning for the mysterious ' blue flower ' of romance. The Baron is called out of his fevered riotous life of skirmish and foray into the still wonderland of enchantment by a compelling vision. It issues out of the glamour of a far-off age of splendid beauty and chivalry, a vision of wonderful loveliness with a mystic distinction given to it by ' the eagle-plume in the dark-brown hair.' He is caught in the spell and becomes an adventurer thenceforth in the magic world of unreality and illusion.

The adventures inside the castle, through which the hero gains access to the sleeping Princess, have all the illusory appearance of a phantasmagoria and the story ends on a mystic note. The spell is broken, but the waking is not as into the world of real life. The laurel-crown of the Druidess falls on the champion's brow :

> " And this was what remain'd of all
> The wealth of each enchanted hall,
> The Garland and the Dame."
>
> (Canto III, st. xxxix)

—typifying the meed of Love and Fame ' due to high worth for daring deed.' But Scott's matter-

of-fact imagination seems to recoil from mystery and he adds a tame ' conclusion ' to tell us that the lovers

" Wedded as lovers wont to wed
When tale or play is o'er;
Lived long and blest, loved fond and true,
And saw a numerous race renew
The honours that they bore."

In the general conduct of the narrative, Scott develops in this poem a quality somewhat alien from his usual art of concrete and clearly-outlined representation of things. Instead of leaving strong independent impressions on the imagination, the scenes and situations tend to melt into a softer atmosphere of romantic sensibility and feeling. They are transfused with a certain dream-like quality seeming to touch and refine the realities to a visionary character. The final disappearance of the magic halls in thunder and lightning, as the warder slips out of Gyneth's grasp, is as the sudden tumbling down of a dream-fabric, like the pleasure-dome on the Alph, on the dreamer's awakening. In fact a finer effect in dealing with the supernatural is here achieved and decidedly in the Coleridgean manner.

Wordsworth

The influence of Scott's romantic narrative on Wordsworth results in the *White Doe of Rylstone*, a poem unique in its interblending of Scott's plangent martial note with Wordsworth's mellow medi-

tativeness and visionary imagination. The wonted supernatural element appears in the poem, but in a rarefied and sublimated kind of supernaturalism, cast round the conception of an animal living from age to age as the vision and symbol of a legendary romantic past. The conception, derived from a local legend, might have been presented by a poet without Wordsworth's delicacy of imagination in a grosser supernatural form. But Wordsworth brings to bear upon it a special quality of imagination which turns the supernatural wonder into a purely 'lovely silvery light of phantasy.' * Perhaps it is the same imaginative quality as moulds to an effect curiously akin to the supernatural some well-known passages of his poetry where the objects described are perfectly natural, even familiar, yet appearing strangely visionary or apocalyptic.†

This tone of visionary feeling is imparted to the White Doe at her first appearance to the sabbath-makers of Bolton Priory :

> "Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
> Comes gliding in serene and slow,
> Soft and silent as a dream,
> A solitary doe."
>
> (Canto I, ll. 55-58)

* Elton's *Survey of English Literature* (1790-1830), Vol. II, p. 77.

† This quality of Wordsworth's imagination has been dealt with by Prof. Bradley in his lecture on Wordsworth (*Oxford Lectures on Poetry*). Passages showing this quality are contained in *The Yew Trees*, *The Highland Girl*, *The Solitary Reaper* and several other poems. The Yew Trees become suddenly informed with 'phantasy' and assume 'looks that threaten the profane;' the Highland Girl, the rocks and trees, and the lake and road by her

The animal is isolated and distanced, as it were. from real life by comparing her to the silver moon left alone in a cloudless sky and to a glittering ship sailing in sunshine far away on the ocean. She seems ' a spirit for one day given, A pledge of grace from purest heaven.' The presence of the wandering doe fills many a damp obscure recess ' with lustre of a saintly show.' The marvellous delicacy with which her appearance and movements are described seems to refine her into something untouchable with mortal hand, an evanescent spirit of mystery.

But it will be observed that in the story itself the doe appears more as a loving and lovely animal. She is the delightful pet of the inmates of Rylstone Castle. Francis is sorry to think that the creature, so happily feeding and straying a few steps away, will have to return to the woods when desolation overtakes Rylstone. Norton is sad to recall the image of Emily whispering sorrowful words to the mute animal in the hawthorn brake. When the hall is left desolate, the milk-white doe approaches forlorn Emily ' to win some look of love or gain encouragement to sport or play,'— attempts which the heart-sick maid rejects or repays with slight. The sudden pathetic recognition of Emily, on her return to Rylstone after wanderings in ' distant places and unknown,' by the creature stopping in mid-career and fixing her large full eyes upon her, is one of the most moving pas-

home seem to be ' like something fashioned in a dream;' the Reaper appears like a vision enwrapped in the mystery of forgotten Gaelic romance.

sages in the poem and is beautifully true to animal nature, as also are the Doe's attempts to comfort Emily in solitude, studying her looks and behaving accordingly. Between the lovely pet of Rylstone Castle and the visionary figure that appears at Bolton Priory, the difference is made palpable by the poet's art.

The imaginative effect of this difference between the two aspects presented by the animal, as she strays about Rylstone Castle and as she appears at Bolton Priory, is exquisitely significant. Since Emily, ' faintly, faintly tied to earth,' was set free and died, a long, long period of time has elapsed. The fate of the Nortons has become a legend and Rylstone a ruin. The solitary doe, coming out of the oblivion of the past and carrying in her deep soulful eyes the forgotten tragedy of other days, is no longer ' a child of Time But daughter of the Eternal Prime.' Time transfigures the creature, and she stands forth to after generations not as a mortal animal, but a mysterious presence, raising the wondering conjectures of the simple folk of the countryside. Time mellows and refines also, and the White Doe, touched by the hand of time, becomes a spirit and vision, shedding off its mortal animal nature. The enchantment, the romantic spirit realises so well, that distance can lend to the view is laid upon the figure of the Doe, the effect of which is decidedly to make the natural appear as something curiously visionary and spirit-like. While Wordsworth's power of presenting natural objects to the imagination in the light of sudden vision works to the transfiguration

of the Doe, the process gains psychological truth from the perspective of time in which the action of the poem is set.

Southey

With Southey we pass on to a different aspect of mediaevalism,—to the attempts made by romantic imagination to reproduce the mediaevalistic supernatural in an exotic and partly incongruous setting. The effect of living or revived tradition seems to be of the very essence of this mode of supernaturalism of which Scott is the master, and the lack of it acts like a fatal blight on Southey's *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama*.

These two prodigious epical poems are really products of that ' inherent curiosity of the romantic spirit ' which we find latent in mediaeval romance and which seems to awaken to a new and strenuous life in modern romanticism. Its workings in mediaeval literature produced a marvellous tissue, heavily embroidered with Celtic glamour, northern myths and fables of the east, into which was woven the long history of Europe,—from the Argonaut's quest for the Golden Fleece, by way of the fall of Troy and the foundation of Rome, to the crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem. The neo-romantic curiosity ranges farther and wider, passing beyond the bounds of European history, and turns in all directions for romantic themes and materials. When it explores the orient for fresh themes and novel settings, it draws not upon the element of orientalism already absorbed by mediaeval romance, but upon the new mythologies

and legends of the east out of which the fresh colour of discovery was not yet faded. Literary antiquarians of the eighteenth century like Sir William Jones had already introduced these materials into English poetry with no very serious purpose or definite artistic aim.* It was Southey who first saw the possibility of annexing the marvels of eastern mythologies to the romantic spirit of the age. The romance and marvel of European mediaevalism are sought to be transformed into those of the stranger, remoter and less comprehensible life of the east, ridden with its monstrous mythologies and demonologies.

But in these poems supernaturalism seems to labour under a curious fatuity, demonstrating by the contrast between the deadness of it in Southey's oriental setting and its striking vitality on Scott's mediaeval Scottish canvas how in the mode of treatment of the supernatural in relation to external life and action, the effect of tradition is a vital matter. The associations of mediaeval castles and abbeys, the modes of feudal life and society, the whole cultural and historical background, serve to invest with a fine plausibility the supernatural figures and incidents in Scott's narratives. This plausibility is derived from a traditionary sense of the mediaeval. But dissociated from such tradition, much of Southey's treatment resolves itself into a recital, however rich and colourful, of marvels that strike the imagination solely with their pure marvellousness. Their orientalism, as will be

* See Sir William Jones's Oriental Poems, Indian and Persian, in Vol. LXXIV of the *British Poets*.

shown in Appendix III, is not a background, but a mere matter of machinery, and curiously enough it is outside this machinery that the best supernatural effects in the poems are obtained.

The most striking departure in these poems from oriental supernaturalism lies perhaps in the conception of the witches. Witchcraft in the west has a history of its own ; it has well-recognised features and forms ; its attributes are well known from literary and historical sources. But the attributes of witchcraft are not the same in eastern systems of superstition and demonology. Southey, however, cannot conceive of witchcraft except in terms of western conception. Hence his witches make a wholly incongruous appearance in their oriental setting.

Lorrinite, for example, in the *Curse of Kehama*, is decidedly a witch of the traditional western type of which there is no true counterpart in Indian folklore, and when the poet tries to orientalise her in Book XVII, 10, by pressing Asuras into her service, the effect becomes grotesque and ludicrous, for the status of Asuras in Indian mythology is inconsistent with such employment. The burning of the wax-image of *Thalaba* by Khawla, again, is an incident borrowed in its main features from accounts of western witchcraft (Ninth Book, 24-25), although the destruction of the 'magical image,' as Frazer tells us, is a world-wide superstition springing out of the primitive belief in the potency of sympathetic magic.* Yet the black

* See Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Part I (The Magic Art), Vol. I, pp. 55-70.

magic of Lorrinite in the *Curse of Kehama* and the solemn sorceries practised with 'co-existent flames' in the Domdanial caverns in *Thalaba* leave more powerful impressions of supernatural terror than the purely oriental marvels. The reason is not far to seek: in these conceptions traditionary associations are invoked. Much of the sense of deadness that afflicts *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama* arises from the fact that their factitious oriental supernaturalism is without any such vitality as Scott draws from revived historical tradition, as for instance, in the conception of Brian the Hermit or the rites of the Fiery Cross in the *Lady of the Lake*. The singular unsuccess of Southey's supernaturalism is instructive, and his oriental epical poems invite a more detailed examination which will be found in Appendix III.

Southey's poems, which were 'unsaleables' in their time and enjoy now what DeQuincey calls 'a sabbath from the impertinencies of critics,' were perhaps a lesson and warning to English poets, and *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama* had no literary successors. When the reign of orientalism began afterwards in romantic poetry with Byron, the orient was exploited for novel splendour, colour and beauty, the glamour of strange costumes and manners, and above all, the primitive strength and violence of the passions. But there was no reversion to the spirit or form of Southey's poems and no regress on the outgrowth of the fantastic spirituality of the east. The *Bride of Abydos* and the *Corsair* were really successors in line of *Marmion* and the *Lady of the Lake*, the romantic themes being only

shifted to far distant scenes by way of escape from the familiarity with which the work of Scott and his followers had invested the mediaeval *mise en scène*.

Moore

Moore took his cue from Byron in *Lalla Rookh* in which the story of *Nourmahal* harks back again to the supernatural strain in Scott's poems, though treated in the vein, of which Byron was the initiator, of the splendid, sensuous and gorgeous orient.

Moore strikes the supernatural strain with a lightness of touch which avoids all stress on the supernatural for its own sake, turning it into a thread of wistful emotional beauty woven into the sumptuous oriental texture of the tale. The theme is the reconciliation of a lover's quarrel through the magic ministrations of Namouna, the enchantress, who enjoys untold Sibylline age, but whose youth and beauty are unfaded. Being an adept in spells and magic, she undertakes to recall by means of a spell ' her Selim's smile to Nourmahal.' The spell is to take the form of a Wreath of Dreams for which Nourmahal goes flower-gathering in her garden, giving occasion to the poet for a display of all strange oriental flowers of magic and enchantment. Out of these flowers, the dream-wreath is woven by Namouna, each having power to raise a vision, as jasmine of love, almond-flower of hope, the mountain-herb of gold, mandrake of phantoms, cinnamon of injury and patience. The wreath has its magic effects, and the yearnings and heart-aches of love

end in the rapture of Selim and Nourmahal's reunion.

It is clear that Namouna's magic is introduced not simply as a piece of oriental wonder-working, and the poet's intention is not to raise a wonder at the supernatural spell and its effect. It is a different use of the supernatural element, which transforms the marvel of it into a master-chord in the concert, which the poem presents, of love and beauty and pleasure in overflowing oriental sensuousness.

Mediaevalism and Supernaturalism: Contrast between Scott and Coleridge

We may observe in this phase of the romantic treatment of the supernatural, in which Southey's oriental supernaturalism appears so alien,—both in the 'localised romance' of legendary poetry and in the freer and finer artistic dealings in the romantic narrative,—how the effect of the supernatural elements in it relies mainly on an imaginative sense of the mediaeval, on the intimacy of the romantic spirit with the imagined 'form and pressure' of those times loosely designated as the Middle Ages. In other romantic dealings with the supernatural, the mediaeval, however, has not quite the same kind of effect. It may indeed be pressed into service as scenic aid to sensibility as by Lewis and his school, or as background or atmosphere as in Coleridge's *Christabel* or Keats's romantic tales, or as the subtle stimulating flavour of other times as in the *Ancient Mariner*, or merely as a curiously

suggestive element like ' Jesu Maria ' in *Christabel* (Part I) or the cross-bow and the shriving by the hermit in the *Ancient Mariner*, but it scarcely enters as an ingredient in the supernatural conception itself. The contrast between Scott and Coleridge is illuminating on this point.

Scott is a mediaevalist, dealing with the mediaeval world. But the world presented by him in so concrete and real a fashion is to Coleridge's mind strangely unsubstantial and illusory, composed merely of what he calls ' contingent and transitory associations.' Significant of Coleridge's attitude to the mediaeval is his manner of critical approach in evaluating the poetic quality of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. " The first thing I should do," says he, " would be to take away all his names of old castles.....I would remove out of the poem all the old armour and weapons ; next, I would exclude the mention of all nunneries, abbeys and priories."* In a mind so constantly ' habituated ' from childhood ' to the vast,'† the lack of the sense of romance that lies coiled in legendary and historical associations is readily intelligible. Gazing at a wall in Caernarvon Castle, Coleridge wished the guide ' fifty miles off ' who was telling him : In this chamber the Black Prince was born.‡ Coleridge himself has very aptly hit off the contrast between Scott and himself in a casual observation

* Collier's Diary quoted in Ashe's *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare* (1897), p. 14.

† See *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by Hartley Coleridge, p. 16.

‡ See *Anima Poetae*, p. 71.

recorded in the *Table Talk*.* Yet the mediaeval affects him too—not indeed by its temporal remoteness, by its difference of form and appearance or by all its concrete chivalric imagery,—but in a wholly different way. Perhaps his morbid dreamy temperament sought after mystery in mediaeval life, turning towards it not the wakeful sense of history, but a sort of dream-sense converting realities into illusions. What to Scott's mind comes with form and reality is converted to Coleridge's into the semblance of witchery and magic.

The supernatural agents,—the demons, spirits and elves with their fateful interferences in human life,—the Scott seems to approach by the light of day and in the world of realities are sought by Coleridge in enchanted darkness or faint moonlight, in the mysterious calms and silences of distant seas, or in his own dream-world heavy with opium fumes. The inherent mystery of the supernatural tends to vanish in the hands of Scott, while in Coleridge's it deepens towards unplumbable depths. The keenly analytical mind of Coleridge delights to trace the workings of the supernatural in a mind possessed by its influence and to track psychological phenomena to powers lurking somewhere perhaps in subliminal consciousness. The supernatural thus stands in his poetry in such intimate relation to half-formed intuitions, irrational mental processes and morbid mental activities that its reality tends curiously to thin away to the point

* See *ibid*, p. 74.

of illusion. But Scott's mind is incapable of dealing with the supernatural with this kind of psychological subtlety. The 'mighty minstrel' had picked it up in the course of his imaginative ramblings through the world of chivalric romance and used it in his poetry refined from its mediaeval grossness.

The substance of the supernatural in Scott still remains mediaeval and concrete. But Coleridge brings to the idea of the supernatural the alchemy of his own critical thinking, not simply refining, but entirely transmuting it from its mediaeval substance. A fundamental difference thus appears between Scott's conception of the supernatural and Coleridge's. With Scott, it is confined to appearances and their reactions on the mind; with Coleridge it passes beyond mere appearances and reactions into the realm of subtle powers, such as the power of an idea violently discharged upon the mind, the various effects of which are delineated in the *Three Graves*, the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*.

CENTRAL LIBRARY

PART III

HORROR-MOTIVE AND DIABLERIE

AND

THEIR INFLUENCE IN ROMANTIC POETRY

(1790-1800)

HORROR-MOTIVE AND DIABLERIE AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN ROMANTIC POETRY

Romanticism and Sensibility to Supernatural Terror

The supernaturalism of English romantic poetry, which had found its medium of expression hitherto in legends of mediaeval life treated in ballad form, was overtaken, during the last decade of the eighteenth century, by a temporary wave of influence from German romantic literature of the so-called 'Sturm and Drang' period. The ballads of Bürger and the dramas of Schiller exercised for a time from 1788 * onwards fascination of a somewhat morbid kind over literary minds by their exaggerated note of horror and violence. This peculiarly German note, which Mme. de Staël pointed to as 'an inexhaustible source of poetical effect in Germany'† and which may appropriately be termed 'horror-romanticism,' crept into the old supernatural terror-motive of which Collins and Gray were the poetical exponents in an earlier period.‡ It brought forth in English romantic literature a phase of supernaturalism, interesting in its earlier filiations and

* Henry Mackenzie's lecture on the German Drama was delivered at Edinburgh on 21st April, 1788. See Scott's *Essay on the Imitations of the Ancient Ballad* (*Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 561). See *supra*, p. 90.

† See Beers's *English Romanticism in the 19th Century*, p. 144.

‡ See *supra*, pp. 47-58.

important in its later influence. But in romantic poetry itself, as apart from fiction and drama, it was a very transient and short-lived phase.

Its curious lack of vitality and creative power was due probably to the fact that, unlike that supernaturalism of the Scottish mediaevalist poets, it had unfolded out of no imaginative vision of life. For later treatment of the supernatural in English romantic poetry, it bears nevertheless a significance quite out of proportion to its intrinsic artistic merit. The mediaevalistic mode had depended for its effect on the traditionary associations of a revived past and its types of life and society, —the haunted castle, the visionary minstrel, the supernatural agents of the romantic action. In the poetry of ' horror-romanticism,' however, the treatment of the supernatural is detached from this reliance on tradition : the supernatural is worked out for its own sake. It is only the effect of horror or a feeling of which horror is the main ingredient that is produced or aimed at in this mode. But the conception of the supernatural defines itself at the same time to that of a terrible overawing power that seizes with tragic results on its human victims. The conception is basic in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, though the treatment of it in the hands of Coleridge gains infinitely more artistic value from its subtlety, inwardness, and implicit psychology. Coleridge, in fact, coming in the rear of the ' horror-romantic ' mode of supernaturalism, seems to lean back upon it even in his revulsion from its extravagances.*

* See Part IV.

The impact of German influence served to turn the old romantic sensibility towards the supernatural in a direction largely alien from it. This sensibility appears already, as we have seen, as a mark of the romantic attitude much earlier in the century. The elaborate contra-distinction drawn by Hurd in his *Letters* between the Classical and the Gothic is projected by him into the realm of the mythological and supernatural. Referring to the ' more solemn fancies of witchcraft and incantation,' Hurd remarks that ' the horrors of the Gothic were above measure striking and terrible.' " The mummeries of the pagan priests were childish, but the Gothic Enchanters shook and alarmed all nature. We feel this difference very sensibly in reading the ancient and modern poets. You would not compare the Canidia of Horace with the witches in *Macbeth*. And what are Virgil's myrtles dropping blood to Tasso's Enchanted Forest?"* The difference which Hurd 'very sensibly' feels between Horace's Canidia and Shakespeare's witches indicates how the romantic sense conceived the terror of the supernatural. The terror created by Shakespeare round his witches as an enveloping atmosphere is sought by Horace in the atrocious realism of his description of the witch herself.† The figure of Canidia, crowned with vipers among grave-grown fig-trees, cypresses and unnamable abominations, has nothing of Shakespeare's imaginative magnification, making

* Morley's Ed., p. 110.

† I have consulted Wheelwright's translation. See *Horace* in Chandos Classics, pp. 164 ff.

terror indefinite by suggestions rather than articulate by descriptive realism,—a mode which Hurd labels as specifically Gothic.

Supernatural terror, as set forth in pre-romantic treatment, is informed by this ' Gothic ' quality,—by a sense of magnitude and indefiniteness evoked by the lurid atmosphere or the gigantesque apparition or vague unseen powers of destruction. This type of terribleness is produced in the looming mythological figures in Gray's poetry and in the visionary forms out of ' hollow charnels,' wrapped with ' funereal horror ' and ' murky night,' in that of Thomas Warton and his followers. It appears also, concretely or as a suffused feeling, in the romances of the school of Walpole and Radcliffe. But the Gothic quality which gives the peculiar indefiniteness and magnitude to supernatural terror admits of several distinguishable elements,—terrible, horrible, grotesque, macabre, bizarre and the rest.

The terror may be presented as a cumulative effect of elementary terrors suggestive of something gruesome or loathsome, grotesque or bizarre. It is well illustrated by Mickle's *Sorceress*,* in which the eyeless toad and the skeletons of a vulture and a fox in death-grip add a repulsive shudder to the gruesome incidents of a human skeleton raising an arm of bone, blue flames bursting through the floor and the ghost beckoning with a half-cut hand. This heterogeneous mixture of terror-elements is found in several legendary

* See *supra*, p. 86.

poems between Mickle and Scott to which there is nothing akin at any rate in old English and Scottish ballads. Into this mode of raising by accumulation of terrors an atmosphere of 'Gothic' luridness, new elements were introduced by the example of a German ballad, which a couple of decades after its publication at Göttingen created a literary sensation at Edinburgh,* then enjoying a cultural pre-eminence in Great Britain as 'the Athens of the north.'

Lenore and its Terror-elements

Since the discovery of Bürger's *Lenore* by William Taylor of Norwich, it has touched with its strangely persistent influence so many supernatural passages in English poetry as to entitle it to a place in the history of English romantic poetry itself. By its luridly stressed, swiftly evolving elements of terror, it is widely differentiated from all the old ghost-ballads in which the terror is a simple elementary feeling with nothing of the dynamic power or complex suggestions present in Bürger's treatment.

A summary impression of the poem shows how it takes up in a new way and gives a new turn to the old supernatural terror-motive. The poem is dramatically conceived, beginning with Lenore's wild blasphemous orgy of grief, followed in response as it were by the sudden sound of a horse's hoofs. A horseman springs down from the saddle, calls the

* See Scott's Essay *On Imitations of the Ancient Ballad* (*Poetical Works*, Edin. Ed., p. 568).

woman by name and Lenore recognises her lover and responds. A brief whispered conversation ensues in which the rider gives obscure hints of something uncanny about him : he cannot tarry long, the bridal bed is a hundred miles away, and ' they and the dead folk ' must ride apace ' ere day with darkness meets.' The thin curtain between the earthly and the unearthly seems to flap and sway to and fro in the wild wind of the hundred miles' rush through moonlight :

" Dost fear, my love? the moon shines bright;
Hurrah! the dead ride fast by night—
Dost fear, my love, the Dead?
Nay, yet let be the Dead! " *

The human note of Lenore's timid replies accentuates by contrast the uncanny feeling of the situation, which is increasingly aggravated by images of death, mourning, crime and reckless ghostly hilarity, seeming to loom up one by one like mile-posts on the ride. Through an ever-increasing tension of terror comes the first shock of the supernatural event, the transformation of the rider into a skeleton. It seems to burst open as it were the locked gates of a ghostly world whence

" Wild shrieks on the night-wind come and go,
Wild laughs rise up from the graves below."

The wedding of the living with the dead in the midst of this ghostly world, encircled by the crazy

* There are numerous English translations of *Lenore*. This quotation and the following are taken from Elizabeth Craigmyle's translation in Garnett's *International Library of Famous Literature*, Vol. IX, pp. 4309 ff.

dance of evil spirits howling with 'eldritch' laughter, is the consummation of the story. The quick is lost irrevocably among the dead, and the mother's consolation that Lenore rejected in a mood of grievous blasphemy comes back to her in a mocking echo from the spirit-world.

The poem, so dramatic, rapid and sweeping in its movement, was really a work of slow and deliberate art, and under its overwhelming sensationalism, the terror-elements are somewhat peculiarly conceived. It is not the simple primitive awe of the supernatural which seizes on the mind with vaguely magnified suggestions of terrors unexpressed. Pervading the whole poem, both in Lenore's natural expression of grief which rises to a shrill pitch of ecstasy and in the supernatural experiences that follow, there is the imaginative violence of that period of early German romanticism to which the title of Klinger's drama, *Sturm und Drang*, has lent itself as a literary label. All the incidents are conceived in this spirit of violence: the terror is always strained to horror. Each incident is a shocking suggestion,—of crime, of violent death, of funeral march, of decay and putrefaction. In the course of the fierce moonlight ride, the ghostly rider hails a phantom procession of mourners and bids it follow; a rout of ghosts dance giddily on a scaffold and they swell the rider's following; and the skeletal transformation is a supreme shock of terror. It lands us right in the midst of that world, entered through the graveyard, the exploitation of which for supernatural thrills and terrors was for the first

time suggested to English romantic poets by this ghastly poem.

The supernatural terror-motive is thus given a definite direction symbolised by Scott's demand for a skull and cross-bones after hearing *Lenore* recited. New elements are imported into the treatment of the terror-motive—crime, violent death, loathsomeness of physical dissolution, the stench, bones and worms of charnels, all aiding to turn the feeling of terror into a complexer feeling, deliberately distempered and pressed to morbidity. To evoke such a feeling, for which 'diablerie' was the current expression in Scott's time, became the object of supernaturalism in romantic poetry for the brief spell it was under the influence of German horror-romanticism.

Scott and 'Monk' Lewis

Scott's poetic career, as is well-known, began with a somewhat feeble adapted translation of this famous ballad. But in the attempt to naturalise the German poem, much of the element of horror, which is so alien from the spirit of the Scottish ballads, is thinned and watered down and the effect intended is largely lost. Working under its fascination, however, Scott began to draw upon the strain of terror in contemporary German poetry. Among other German poets, Goethe is laid under contribution by him for two of his German adaptations, *viz.*, *Frederick and Alice* and the *Erl-King*.*

* See Stokoe's *German Influence in the English Romantic Period*, p. 77.

The horror-strain, derived from German sources, is imported by Scott into his original poetry,—into the primitive crusade story of the *Fire-King*, the Scottish legendary poems, *Glenfinlas* and the *Eve of St. John*, all of which were first published in Lewis's *Tales of Terror*, and as a remarkable touch of lurid colour into an interpolated stanza of the old ballad of *Thomas Rhymer*.

Glenfinlas and the *Eve of St. John* exhibit more clear and distinct marks of German influence than the *Fire-King*, the spirit of which is more akin to old Arthurian romance. In each of the first two poems, the horror-motive is developed. In the former, the horror arises out of the awful alteration and magnification of the spirit's vanishing form, followed up with ' loud bursts of ghostly laughter,' ' a shower of blood,' ' a mangled arm ' with fingers straining on a half-drawn blade, and lastly Ronald's bleeding, gasping head just severed from the trunk, —all indicating his horribly cruel, supernatural end. In the latter poem, the horror issues out of a subtler source,—the scorch-mark on the lady's wrist and the ' sable score of fingers four ' on the oaken beam. The aids to horror in it are drawn from images of murder, of the grave ' deep and dark ' and the corpse ' stiff and stark,' of worms creeping round the buried body. But the crudity, with which the motive is worked out in the other poem, is considerably refined in this, and the subtlety of other-worldly sorcery and magic takes the place of the coarseness of producing torn and bleeding limbs. In the unfinished poem, *The Gray Brother*, which is based on the Catholic superstition

that the presence of an unconfessed and unabsolved sinner stops automatically the holy service of the altar, Scott was probably about to take up the motive again. The ballad ends abruptly with the figure of the pilgrim kneeling before the friar who lays on his neck an ' ice-cold hand.' The story, somewhat dramatically conceived and of brilliant promise, would perhaps have revealed something horrible and supernatural about the personality of the Gray Brother and disclosed the mystery of Lord Albert's sin. In the old ballad of *Thomas Rhymer*, Scott adds to the terror of the journey of Thomas through the elf-land by making a portion of the journey lie across a land which sucks in all the blood shed on earth :

" It was mirk mirk night, and there was nae stern light,
And they waded through red blude to the knee;
For a ' the blude that shed on earth
Rins through the springs o' that countrie."

It is a touch of German ' horror-romanticism ' for which there is no warrant in the originals used by Scott,* though Prof. Gummere is inclined to regard it as an instance of ' lapsed mythology ' in ballad poetry.†

* See Child's *English and Scottish Ballads* (Student's Cambridge Ed.), pp. 64-65. In the ' c ' version of the ballad which is the more ancient one and which Scott used, there is no mention of blood. See also Veitch's *Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, Vol. I, p. 127 : "They (the references to the journey through blood) are a continuance, gruesome enough, due probably to Scott himself. They have the touch of the mood of Scott's mind, of the period of the compilation of the ' Minstrelsy,' which was steeped in the German romantic ballad."

†"Ancient myth from Germanic days still lurks in the reference to middle-earth, an alliterative phrase of *Sir Cawline*, and

It was in the hands of ' Monk ' Lewis, however, that the horror-motive developed on genuinely German lines. Lewis's literary activities were many and varied,—he was a novelist, melodramatist, translator from German, patron of supernatural poetry, and poet himself. But in this last capacity, he lives in English literary history only by his gruesome ballad of *Alonzo and Imogene*. It is inset as a poetical interlude in *The Monk*, a romance which may be fitly described as a synthesis of German diablerie,—of magic and sorcery, scenic appearances of blood-stained ghosts, lustful crime and cruelty, Satanic enchantment and the horror of a supernatural catastrophe.* In this overcharged atmosphere, the ballad of *Alonzo and Imogene* blooms like a hideously fascinating orchid.

The poem undoubtedly shaped itself under the influence of Bürger's *Lenore*. The catastrophe combines, as in Bürger's poem, two sensational incidents, *viz.*, the wedding of the living with the dead and the jubilation and revelry of the ghostly rout.

those ' rivers aboon the knee ' or even ' blude to the knee ' of *Thomas Rhymer* :

' For a ' the bluid that's shed on earth
Rins through the springs of that countrie.'.....

is perhaps popular lore, too, with a glimpse of the old Scandinavian ' water-hell.' "—*The Popular Ballad*, p. 302.

* See *The Monk—a Romance*, ed. by Baker :

Ch. VII—Matilda's magic and sorcery.
,, IX—Elvira's ghost.
,, XII—Delivery by Matilda to Ambrosio of the Book of Enchantment to conjure up Lucifer.
,, ,,—Ambrosio's pact with Lucifer and the carrying off of Ambrosio to the brink of a precipice in Sierra Morena.

But it is lower in the scale of sensationalism and, instead of the rapid variety of melodramatic sensations which lead up to the catastrophe in *Lenore*, we have a single concentrated situation.

The story is the old, old one of the betrayed sweetheart, dead and buried, coming out of the grave and demanding satisfaction. The horror is concentrated in the appearance of the ghost which is typical of Lewis's ghostly creations. His ghosts are not visionary phantom-like beings imbued with a minimum of materiality,—betrayed by a groan, such as were conjured up by terror-novelists like Reeve, trifling timidly with the mysteries of the other world. With them, their use had been not so much to create horror as to produce suspense, a preliminary or preparatory state of mind which is not intensified into actual horror. Lewis's mode is to cut off the preparatory state of suspense, to avoid leading the mind through stages of tension, but to impart a sudden and overwhelming shock of terror. His ghosts, therefore, do not come through any hazy atmosphere of suggested fear and ghastliness, but appear all too suddenly on the scene, marked with loathsome features of decay and dissolution, in all their gruesome skeletal hideousness. The single intended and achieved effect is to raise a repulsive feeling of mixed horror and loathing. Vizored terror becomes exposed loathsomeness :

" His vizor was closed, and gigantic his height,
His armour was sable to view:
All pleasure and laughter were hushed at his sight,
The dogs, as they eyed him, drew back in affright,
The lights in the chamber burned blue."

And when the terror was exposed :

" All present then uttered a terrified shout,
All turned with disgust from the scene :
The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
And sported his eyes and temples about,
While the spectre addressed Imogene :—"

The climax of the narrative is reached in the giddy dance of the jubilant ghostly rout drinking in blood from freshly torn skulls the health of Alonzo and Imogene. Lewis's mode reaches its extreme limit in another ballad, entitled *Grim, King of the Ghosts* or *The Dance of Death*, where this climax of ghostly sensationalism is torn from all context and exhibited without narrative setting in unadorned isolated nakedness as it were. The King of Ghosts takes the grave-digger's daughter to his ' charnel-house palace ' to witness the dance of skeletons. The intention contained in the motto taken from *Othello*,' ' On horror's head, horrors accumulate,' is carried out with unstinted realism, the extreme grotesqueness of which almost passes over into the ludicrous.

Lewis is described by Byron as ' Apollo's sexton ' * and the description is peculiarly appropriate. The graveyard where the poets of the eighteenth century mused and moralised on death

* " O wonder-working Lewis ! monk or bard,
Who fain would make Parnassus a churchyard !
Lo ! wreaths of yew, not laurel, bind thy brow,
Thy muse a sprite, Apollo's sexton thou ! "
—*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

is the place where Lewis gluts his morbid romantic sensibility with the physical horrors of death. His *Tales of Terror*, in its inner relation to romanticism, is in one respect supplementary to Percy's *Reliques*. The obverse side of mediaevalism is held up to the romantic spirit and feeling in Percy's work : its reverse side in Lewis's. The spirit of feudal chivalry, the vigour and energy of life in action, the adventure and 'derring-do,' find utterance in the minstrelsy and balladry edited by Percy ; but the brooding and gloomy mentality of superstitious terror, 'intellectually so preposterous, spiritually so strange,' reflects itself in Lewis's tales.

In the introductory dialogue in the *Tales of Wonder* (1801), Lewis gives a conspectus of the themes which, according to him :

> "Rouse, in the trembling breast, delightful dreams,
> And steep each feeling in romance's streams."

But the streams flow from a dark fountain, and

> "Pale Terror trembling guards the fountain's head,
> And rouses Fancy on her wakeful bed:
> From realms of viewless spirits tears the veil,
> And half reveals the unutterable tale."

The romantic themes mentioned by Lewis are strikingly miscellaneous and ill-sorted, though the strain of gloomy superstition,—of wizardry, witchcraft, goblins and ghosts wandering at midnight,—prevails among them. Working under this conception of romanticism, he composes

in his *Tales of Terror* a regular 'hobgoblin repast,' 'a substantial feast of mediaeval terrors,' in each dish of which, as he says, 'a ghost or a witch is a *sine qua non* ingredient.' * Lewis may, in fact, claim to be looked upon as the artistic exponent in English poetry of a special aspect of the romantic spirit which caught as in a mirror the dark reverse side of mediaeval life. This aspect of romanticism casts a lengthening shadow along the whole course of English romantic poetry, touching fitfully the works of Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Moore and Shelley.

The feeling for the lurid, the grotesque and the bizarre is, according to Walter Pater, the extreme of the romantic quest for 'strangeness in beauty'.† The artistic scope of this feeling, however, was somewhat narrowly restricted from the start in English romantic poetry by the influence of the earlier and inferior romantic literature of Germany. Horror-romanticism, as it has been called, aimed at the evocation of a single overmastering emotion. The emotion was sought after, not in its finer or subtler imaginative modes, but in the grosser sensational forms which are related to the physical sensibility of the nerves, to what is implied by the French expression, 'le frisson.'

* See Eino Railo's *Haunted Castle*, a study of the terror-elements in romantic literature, in which there is a good account of the life and literary activities of M. G. Lewis. See p. 106 of *The Haunted Castle*.

† See Postscript (on Classical and Romantic) in the *Appreciations*.

It would be an interesting point of experimental psychology to consider whether this sensibility might be modified in the life-history of the race, for Gray's fear to go to bed after perusal of the *Castle of Otranto*,* Coleridge's sensation on reading at mid-night a scene from Schiller's *Robbers*,† Shelley's grotesque hallucination after listening to *Christabel*,‡ the morbid interest in German ghost-stories of the brilliant literary group that met at the Villa Diodati in the early summer of 1816, the persistent popularity of charnel-house spectres who, as Lisbeth in Meredith's novel, *Farina*, tells Margarita, "uttered noises that wintered the blood and revealed sights that stiffened the hair three feet long : ay, and kept it stiff,"—all these must appear to the present generation rather strange and incomprehensible. In any case, the emotion that horror-romanticism sought to exploit was not something fundamental like our inborn awe of unseen or supernatural powers, but a mere matter of nervous excitability. This, in fact, makes all the difference in the treatment of the supernatural terror-motive

* See Gray's Letter to Horace Walpole, dated Dec. 30, 1764—"It (*Castle of Otranto*) engages our attention here, makes some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o' nights." (Gray's *Essays and Criticism*, Belles Lettres Series, p. 271.)

† "'Tis past one o'clock in the morning. I sat down at twelve o'clock to read the 'Robbers' of Schiller. I had read, chill and trembling, when I came to the part where the Moor fixes a pistol over the robbers who are asleep. I could read no more."—*Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by Hartley Coleridge, p. 96.

‡ The hallucination was that of a woman with eyes upon her breasts. See Clutton-Brock's *Shelley the Man and the Poet*, p. 134. Also Strong's *Three Studies in Shelley*, pp. 122-23.

between the earlier school of Collins and Gray and the later school of ' horrors ' represented by Lewis.

In order to evoke the emotion of terror, a two-fold mode of working on the imagination is employed,—by the accumulation of hideous associations of death and putrid decay, cerecloths, blood, bones and worms, with a setting of graveyards and ruins, and by physical magnification of the object of terror, *e.g.*, the spirit waxing tall till her form grows to the roof in Scott's *Glenfinlas*, the giant arms in Southey's *Rudiger*, the gigantic stature of the vizored ghost in Lewis's *Alonzo and Imogene*. But the associations are soon exhausted and cannot be indefinitely varied in newer combinations. " The insolence of coarse horrors," as Prof. Raleigh remarks, " soon exhausts its themes ; the grave gives up its dead, and has not more to give to the realistic artist." * The physical magnification also appears to be a crude and inelastic device compared with the power of that mental magnification, which is induced by suspense as in the novels of terror, or effected by subtle indirect suggestions as Maturin was a consummate master of. The device in ' horror-romantic ' poetry is a traditionary one, employed by Milton in some of his epic descriptions, as well as by the terror-novelists with varying degrees of artistic power and aesthetic propriety, from the gigantic apparition of Alphonso in the catastrophe of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* to the huge man-created monster in Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The ' pressing too

* *The English Novel*, p. 235.

hard on the springs of terror ' was moreover attended with the inevitable reaction which betrays itself in a strain appearing even in the *Tales of Terror*—a comic, ironical strain running side by side with the terrible and grotesque. Coleridge tells us that, "paradoxical as it may appear, the terrible, by a law of the human mind, always touches on the verge of the ludicrous," * and perhaps it was in a fit of psychological self-searching that Lewis wrote a parody of his own ballad of *Alonzo and Imogene*.†

The historical position, so far as the ' art of horror ' in romantic literature is concerned, may be summed up thus in the words of a contemporary investigator of the subject : " With the spread of the school of taste represented by Lewis, this type of literature, the 'German horrors' of English literary history, had begun to reach England in the form of translations. Parallel with these 'horrors' and influenced chiefly by the work of Mrs. Radcliffe and Lewis, an original, purely English school of such work had likewise begun to flourish, and together the two were responsible, at the turn of the nineteenth century, for an extraordinarily large mass of pedlar-literature that laid under its thrall the uneducated public and even threatened to oust all better work from the theatre. Only the combined influence of Jane Austen's trenchant irony, the general feeling of surfeit and finally Sir Walter Scott's narrative art helped at last to stem this

* See Coleridge's *Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare*, Everyman's Library, p. 147.

† *Giles Jollup the Grave and Brown Sally Green.*

destructive flood of bad literature, or at least to lead it into subordinate channels.'' * The occasional tricklings of horror-romanticism through 'subordinate channels' of imagination may indeed be traced throughout later romantic poetry.

Influence of Horror-romanticism in Romantic Poetry :

In Later Legendary Poetry

Horror-romanticism, being introduced into English poetry in the early nineties of the century by Scott and Lewis, cuts sheerly across the course of romantic legendary poetry. The trick of this type of poetry, once made easy and familiar by the Scottish masters, became a temptation hanging about the paths not only of many a poetaster, but also of some leading romantic poets in their earlier novitiate periods.

A curious shifting of artistic intention and imaginative effect takes place in later legendary poetry under this influence. The poet's intention is no longer to insinuate us into the gloomy superstitious atmosphere of the mediaeval castle, but to direct imaginative sensibility solely to a situation of horror. The romantic feeling for the mediaeval is transformed into a morbidly concentrated interest of which horror, loathsomeness and wonder are the simple ingredients. This kind of interest becomes more and more infused into later poems dealing with romantic and supernatural

* Eino Railo's *Haunted Castle*, p. 122.

legends, till they are no longer the earlier passion-flowers of the mediaeval revival, but mere ' flowers of yew.'

When Southey comes to this type of poetry, which is one of several lines essayed by him, he has already passed from the influence under which the juvenile ode *To Horror* was written to the sinister spell of Lewis. His ballads and shorter ' metrical tales ' are marked by a refreshing range and variety and fall into four principal groups, *viz.*, (*i*) Romantic Legendary, *e.g.*, *Donica*, *Rudiger* and *Lord William*; (*ii*) Religious Legendary, *e.g.*, *Jaspar*, *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, *Queen Orraca* and *The Rose*; (*iii*) Supernatural, humorously and satirically treated, *e.g.*, *The Pious Painter*, *Cornelius Agrippa*, *St. Romuald*, *The Old Woman of Berkeley*, *God's Judgment on a Wicked Bishop* and *A True Ballad of St. Antidus*; and (*iv*) forming a link between (*i*) and (*iii*), *e.g.*, *The Well of St. Keyne* and *Bishop Bruno*.

In the first group of poems, the usual tradition of legendary mediaevalism is carried on, modified, however, in colour and background by the ' exoticism' which quickly replaced in romantic poetry the ' localised romance ' of the early Scottish poets. The legend is made to centre round the familiar ancient castle, by a lake or a river or a moat, associated with ominous supernatural occurrences. But the catastrophes of these poems are intended to rouse the feeling of horror through ' diablerie ' of the German type. The customary properties of horror are used,—in *Donica*, the taper burning blue, the physical reactions of horror, the howling

demon ; in *Rudiger*, the mysterious disappearance of the human victim ; in *Lord William*, the scream from the watery grave and the apparition that objectifies itself into a corpse.

Moore, among his juvenile compositions, has a few legendary poems, *e.g.*, *The Ring* (which is an adaptation of a German poem with a little weird play of mystery about an animated statue) and *Reuben and Rose* (which is a tale of a lover's chivalry with the usual mediaeval castle and sombre supernatural warnings and omens), in addition to the *Lake of the Dismal Swamp* in which a ghost-legend of Norfolk in Virginia in pressed into the service of the horror-motive.

More interesting perhaps in this line of poetry is Byron's *Oscar of Alva*, again a juvenile composition, insipid and without much poetic merit, but claiming notice for its curious intermingling of the influence of Scottish legendary poetry and that of German romantic literature. In Byron's poem, the substance of an episode in Schiller's *Ghost-seer* appears in a setting of Scottish mediaevalism with its peculiar characteristics of clannishness and martial ardour, and an infusion of local colour also is attempted by the introduction of the pibroch, the claymore and the feast on the mountain-deer. The episode of Jeronymo and Lorenzo, which forms one of the adventures of the hero told by the imprisoned Sicilian accomplice, is the basis of the ballad of Oscar. The Italian colour of the story is converted into Scottish,* and the story is pruned of its ele-

* The Marquis, searching with the help of galleys for his son supposed to have been carried off by Algerian pirates (see *Schiller's*

ments of charlatanry in order to bring it into line with the usual horror-motive of later legendary poetry. But the crisis is copied almost word for word from Schiller, when the ghost of Oscar recognises the murderer's voice. The appearance of a ghost in the midst of a wedding feast has nowhere been treated of with greater effect of gruesomeness than in Lewis's *Alonzo and Imogene*. Byron's juvenile power fails to command the effect achieved by Lewis.

In Romantic Narrative Poetry

Perhaps the crudest intrusion of horror-romanticism into narrative poetry is seen in the allegorical machinery of Southey's *Vision of the Maid of Orleans* in which the charnel-house properties are employed with a view to the well-worn ' horror-romantic ' effect. Despair (personified) drags the maid on 'through a low iron door, down broken stairs,'—

> " Then a cold horror through the Maiden's frame
> Crept, for she stood amid a vault, and saw,
> By the sepulchral lamp's dim glaring light,
> The fragments of the dead." *

The ' trophies of mortality ' are described with unsparing realism down to ' the eyeless sockets and the

Works, Bohn's Standard Library, Vol. IV, p. 409), becomes the old chief of Alva's clan scouring the mountain caves for his lost son. The Armenian himself becomes a ' stranger chief,' robed in black and plumed with ' gory red.'

* The *Vision of the Maid of Orleans*, Book I, originally formed the 9th Book of *Joan of Arc* and it was separated in the second edition of the latter poem, as Southey thought that its allegorical character was not consistent with the general design of the epic.

unfleshed jaws ' and the trail of the pampered flesh-worm. The witch Lorrinite in the *Curse of Kehama* is said to have gratified Shelley's youthful taste for horrors, and Southey could not think of giving the finishing touch to the picture of the witch without a reference to dry and mouldering bones sweating cold and Death itself shuddering ' in the silent chambers of the tomb ' with dread of her approach.

When situations or objects of intense terror are to be described, Scott seems to be touched by the dead hand of the obsolete art and hark back to the old outworn conceptions. When, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the Priest and Deloraine return through the aisles of Melrose Abbey after securing the Book of Might from the clasp of Michael Scott's buried corpse, the familiar situation raises the customary images. They hear strange noises on the blast, loud sobs and louder laughter ' as if the fiends kept holiday.' The Vault of Penitence in *Marmion* :

> " Whence if so loud a shriek were sent,
> As reach'd the upper air,
> The hearers bless'd themselves, and said,
> The spirits of the sinful dead
> Bemoan'd their torments there;"
>
> (Canto II, st. xvii.)

and the horrors of the Inquisition enacted in the vault are touched by the old influence. It seems just to slip unawares into the account of Fitz-James's dreams at night in the woodland castle in

the *Lady of the Lake* and betray itself in the horror of Jutta's evil eye in *Harold the Dauntless*.

The influence of horror-romanticism put forth, however, a belated flower in Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. In the story of the *Veiled Prophet of Khorassan*, the dark strands taken out of the earlier English as well as the later German school of horrors are woven close into an oriental texture. In the background of the tragic love-story of Azim and Zelica looms mysterious terror in the person of the Veiled Prophet. Mokanna belongs to the type of character,—sinister, cruel, revengeful, lustful and misanthropical,—which Byron wrought out of the original in Mrs. Radcliffe's Schedoni. But in stead of the monk's cowl which shades the sinister, livid features of Schedoni,* the oriental veil is made to cover a mysterious horror which turns out to be a terribly hideous congenital disfigurement in the face of Mokanna. The reaction of the horror, about the nature of which we are kept in the dark till the last, like the horror in the cupboard in Mrs. Radcliffe's story, upon the half-demented girl when it is disclosed to her, is in the genuine manner of Mrs. Radcliffe :

" He raised his veil—the Maid turn'd slowly round,
Look'd at him—shriek'd—and sunk upon the ground."

* See the description of Schedoni in *The Italian*—" There was something terrible in his air, something almost superhuman. The cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face increased its severe character and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye which approached to horror."

—exactly as the heroines of Mrs. Radcliffe are wont to do. The dread voice reminding Zelica of her marriage-oath, that rings through the casement and devastates her plan of elopement with her lover, imparts exactly the kind of thrill one experiences in similar situations in the novels of terror. The marriage in the charnel-house, followed by the pledging of the bridal oath in blood, was pointed to long ago by Jeffrey as " one of the overstrained theatrical horrors of the German school." * In the total imaginative effect of the story, the horror-motive comes well into relief from the oriental setting, which is purely factitious, constructed from out-of-the-way book-lore merely.

On Wordsworth and Coleridge

When Coleridge began his poetic career during the nineties of the century, the spell of ' horrors ' was a spreading infection in the air. His juvenile poetry contains fitful lurid allusions to them— ' grim phantoms,' ' scorpion kings,' and 'a hideous hag, th' Enchantress Pleasure.' In the *Destiny of Nations*, the terrors of the primaeval legends of Lapland and Greenland,—of ' that giant bird Vuokho ' and of ' the Greenland Wizard,'— are pressed into the service of the conventional ' horror-romantic ' effect. But Coleridge and also Wordsworth, outgrowing their poetic nonage, arrived, as we know, at a saner and more aesthetic perception of romantic values in poetry. Yet, curi-

* Jeffrey's article on Moore in *Edinburgh Review*, Nov., 1817. (See *Essays on English Poets and Poetry by Jeffrey*, New Universal Library, Routledge, p. 502.)

ously enough, even in their mature poetic work they are haunted by the old influence. The *Ancient Mariner* in its original version contained passages of overstressed ghastliness with the well-worn charnel-house associations, and these passages probably prompted Southey's sweeping remark that the poem was 'a Dutch attempt at German sublimity.' * The passage, expunged in later versions, descriptive of the Death-Mate of Nightmare Life-in-Death is well-known. It seeks to reproduce the rotten skeletal hideousness of Bürger and Lewis :

" His bones were black with many a crack,
All black and bare, I ween;
Jet-black and bare, save where the rust
Of mouldy damps and charnel crust
They 're patch'd with purple and green."

Again, in the concluding part of the poem, two spectacles, in stead of one as in the final version, were introduced to greet the mariner's eyes from on board the doomed ship about to sink in the harbour-bay,—one of horrid gruesomeness, a charnel horror, the other, in contrast to it, one of radiant heavenly grace,—of the flaming seraph-men. The first, which was a sight of corpses giving the signal of departure, is thus described :—

" They lifted up their stiff right arms,
They held them strait and tight;
And each right arm burnt like a torch,
A torch that's borne upright.

* The remark, which is unintelligible without reference to the original version of the *Ancient Mariner*, occurs in Southey's anonymous article on the *Lyrical Ballads* in the *Critical Review* of October, 1798.

Their stony eye-balls glittered on
In the red and smoky light.''

In *Christabel* too, the description of the horrid disfigurement and distortion of Geraldine's body was suppressed with an aposiopesis and refined into a mystery ' to dream of, not to tell.' Although the supposed *Lenore* influences on Coleridge do not seem to stand the test of scrutiny,* the work was undoubtedly affected by the prevailing horror-romanticism of the last decade with which he was conversant both as a theatre-goer and also as a book-reviewer for the *Critical Review*. But the poet outgrew its influence and was unsparing and diligent in excision of passages like the above, which stood out in his maturer poetry as fossils of an extinct literary mode.

To horror-romanticism, Wordsworth may be believed to have no temperamental affinity or imaginative inclination. He had not '' the faintest interest in German poetry, or (apart from one or two unimportant loans) in any German poet.'' '' On the contrary, he continued to associate with Germany precisely those mischievous extravagances which most conflicted with his own ideal of truth to life.'' † Yet the spectral sight at the end of *The Thorn*, which touches '' with alien horror and awe

* The question of the influence of Bürger's *Lenore* on Coleridge, raised by Brandl in his German work on ' Coleridge and the English Romanticism,' has been examined by Stokoe in his book on *German Influence in the English Romantic Period*, pp. 101-11.

†Herford's *Wordsworth*, p. 113.

the native atmosphere of the village incident,"* has the mark, though refined out of German crudity, of the conventional horror-motive. The story, which was of the poet's invention, naturally invites comparison with William Taylor's version of a poem by Bürger published in the *Monthly Magazine* about a couple of years before the composition of Wordsworth's poem.† In Bürger's poem too, there are a grave and a neighbouring pond. But the horror of the poem is made by a blue flame issuing out of the baby's grave and the ghost of the gibbeted mother trying in vain to quench it and pining beside the pool. It is typical of the German mode, and Wordsworth's improvement on this type of horror in *The Thorn* is an exquisite artistic refinement.

In the Horror-strain of Shelley's Poetry

The terror-motive, which in English literary history spreads longer and larger ramifications in fiction and melodrama and is probably not withered yet, yielded to English romantic poetry a short and temporary and a somewhat barren phase of art. Appearing first as merely an emotional feeling,—the feeling of the terror of a supernatural situation as in Scottish legendary poetry,—the terror under the impact of German influence was pressed from a sensible feeling into concrete material 'horrors,' and their significance, which is unrelated to intrinsic quality, is well hit off by Prof. Ker

* *Ibid*, p. 101.

† See the *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Hutchison, pp. 242-43 (Notes).

who observes that "the close of the eighteenth century cannot be fully understood, nor the progress of poetry in the nineteenth, without some study of the plague of ghosts and skeletons which has left its mark on the *Ancient Mariner*, from which Goethe and Scott did not escape, which imposed on Shelley in his youth, to which Byron yielded his tribute of *The Vampire*." * This 'plague of ghosts and skeletons' probably left its subtler after-effects in the strain of overstressed feeling, the sense of veiled dreadfulness, the mystery that lures but to destroy, which marks the most characteristic attitude towards the supernatural in the romantic poetry that begins its course with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

The old terror-motive, however, puts forth a finer issue, fused and transformed into a peculiar strain and stress of imagination, in Shelley's poetry. It represents, perhaps, the last term of its evolution in English romanticism,—its final sublimation.

The development of Shelley's imagination in regard to the supernatural from the coarse boyish horrors of the *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire* to the super-terrestrial sublimities of the *Witch of Atlas* will be referred to in a different connection.† But, issuing perhaps from the earlier juvenile stage of his imagination, horror-romanticism seems to have passed in his maturer poetry through the in-

* Lecture on *Sir Walter Scott*, 22nd May, 1919 (see *Collected Essays of W. P. Ker*, ed. by Whibley, Vol. I, p. 171).

† See Part VI.

tense stress of that ' desire for a beauty born of unlikely elements, by a profound alchemy, by the charm which wrings it even out of terrible things,' which Pater regards as one of the main motives of romanticism.* It is possible to trace this motive in Shelley's own view and estimate of the reconciling and transforming power of poetry. This power, according to Shelley, " turns all things to loveliness ; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed ; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change ; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things." He adds that " its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters that flow from death through life." † Shelley rings variously modulated changes, from the loud to the low and subdued, on the gamut of horror, keyed to this higher motive.

The horror of a baffled passion simmering in death and sepulchral decay, which characterises the ghosts of Bürger and Lewis, is raised to a plangent note in Laon's vision of Cythna's ghost in the *Revolt of Islam* :

" A woman's shape, now lank and cold and blue,
The dwelling of the many-coloured worm,
Hung there : the white and hollow cheek I drew
To my dry lips,—What radiance did inform

* See Postscript (on Classical and Romantic) in the *Appreciations*.

† *A Defence of Poetry* (see *Shelley's Essays and Letters*, ed. by Rhys, Scott Library, p. 36).

Those horny eyes? Whose was that withered form?
Alas, alas! it seemed that Cythna's ghost
Laughed in those looks, and that the flesh was warm
Within my teeth! ''

(Canto III, st. xxvi)

But the horror is subdued to a low tone,—to the morbid startling suggestion of a dream of death and entombment,—in the following passage of *Alastor* which describes the solitary gazing into a forest pool. It presents an illusory mental phenomenon which the poet in his characteristic way of ' reversed comparison ' makes illustrative of something real and concrete :

"..... His eyes beheld
Their own wan light through the reflected lines
Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
Sees its own treacherous likeness there."

(ll. 469-474)

The poet's pre-occupation with Death in its power of physical dissolution, corruption and putrefaction appears in numerous passages of Shelley's poetry, suffused with the feverish, almost hectic, glow of an imagination intent on morbid images. His language abounds in words expressive of the morbid interest,—ghosts, shades, charnel, tomb, torture, agony, etc. Such words and images are probably but an outward manifestation of a peculiar strain in his mental constitution,—' the sinister

in Shelley,' as a contemporary writer calls it,*— bearing affinity to the spirit of horror-romanticism. This peculiar strain in Shelley, interblended perhaps with his early fascination for supernatural horrors, asserts itself not as mere horror-romanticism, but as an overstressed feeling for ' beauty wrung even out of terrible things ' in his maturer poetry, where his imagination is absorbed in visions of an entirely different order. In *Queen Mab* and the *Revolt of Islam*, passages which are informed by this feeling seem to be charged with the reminiscences of an earlier stage of his imaginative growth. The vision, which the Spirit unfolds to Ianthe in *Queen Mab*,† is lurid in its symbolism of ' strange things ' that are

> " Like animated frenzies, dimly moved
> Shadows, and skeletons, and fiendly shapes,
> Thronging round human graves;"
>
> (Part I, ll. 256-258)

and of their gruesome activities in building

> ".....vast trophies, instruments
> Of murder, human bones, barbaric gold,
> Skins torn from living men, and towers of skulls
> With sightless holes gazing on blinder heaven," *etc.*
>
> (*Ibid*, ll. 263-266)

Likewise in the description of the ravaged village in Canto VI of the *Revolt of Islam* to which Laon is

* See Strong's *Three Studies in Shelley.*

† In the version published in the *Alastor* volume of 1816.

conveyed through the tempest by the giant Tartarian steed and his adventures there with the Pantom of Pestilence, the horror of corpses staring with horny eyes upon each other's face and the 'salt bitterness of blood in the waters' (st. xlvii) forms a ghastly prelude to the more gruesome and eerie encounter with Pestilence in the shape of a famished woman driven to madness by hunger and lustful passion. The description of famine and plague in the Golden City in Canto X bristles with all the terrible forms of pollution, distortion and loathsomeness, wrought by starvation and death (sts. xiii-xxiii). But such passages are not mere embellishments of horror and are not conceived in the vein of deliberate horror-romanticism : they fall readily into the main tone of imagination in which the whole epic narrative is set,—a tone of haunted visionary feeling constantly stirred and stimulated by the gruesome and morbid.

While in *Queen Mab* and the *Revolt of Islam*, the horrible is presented for its effect of horror, in other poems of Shelley finer implications of feeling are won out of it. Thus in *Rosalind and Helen*, the apparitions of the lovers martyred to mob fury along with their innocent love-child, filling with 'spectral dread' the solitary spot to which Helen repairs (ll. 146-66), serves to add an edge of tragic significance to the passionate tale. In the ravings of the maniac in *Julian and Maddalo*, the old motive of the broken troth claimed by the ghostly lover, worked on by Bürger and Lewis, reappears more finely as an image among the flitting visions of a deranged mind :

" I must remove
A veil from my pent mind. 'Tis torn aside!
O, pallid as Death's dedicated bride,
Thou mockery which art sitting by my side,
Am I not wan like thee? at the grave's call
I haste invited to thy wedding-ball
To greet the ghastly paramour, for whom
Thou hast deserted me.....and made the tomb
Thy bridal bed.....But I beside your feet
Will lie and watch ye from my winding-sheet—
Thus.....wide awake tho' dead."

(ll. 382-392)

The ' wormy circumstance ' of the decay of the Garden in the *Sensitive Plant*, the dissolution of which is like that of a decaying corpse, is, in its loathsomeness, but a fitting climax to the fantastic allegory embodying the Shelleyan idea of the loathliness of matter out of which the spirit of beauty has fled. In Shelley's really creative poetry which may be counted from *Queen Mab*, his imagination takes a fresh turn from the spirit which produced *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne* and the *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire* and passes from the mysteries of the occult and the supernatural and their horror and dread into a far different realm,—that of unearthly fantasy, cosmic vision and prophetic or humanitarian passion in various symbolisms. In this transition from the supernatural to sublimer interests of the spirit, his imagination undergoes a widening and heightening from supernaturalism to what has been termed 'super-terrestrialism' with which we shall deal in a later part of the present work.

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PART IV

THE SUPERNATURAL IN HUMAN AND PSYCHOLOGICAI TREATMENT :

Its Formative Ideas, Principles and Artistic Developments

THE SUPERNATURAL IN HUMAN AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT :

Its Formative Ideas, Principles and Artistic Developments

Renovated Conception of the Supernatural

Coming to Wordsworth and Coleridge in the course of our survey, we seem to reach a definite turning-point. The whole movement, beginning far back with Gray and Collins, in which the revived supernaturalism was involved, becomes with Wordsworth and Coleridge self-conscious and critical. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, when their creative work begins, supernaturalism has an established and assured place in romantic poetry : it inheres already in the romantic imagination. But it has shaped for itself scarcely yet any definite or adequate aim or art of expression.

Scott's romantic narratives, in which mediaevalistic supernaturalism reaches its finished artistic expression, were yet to come. It was in the legendary tales out of which colour had long faded that the supernatural motive was being threshed out with dreary ease and monotony, either in association with the mediaevalistic tradition or with a view to the horror-romantic effect. But from the traditionary treatment to the horror-romantic, the conception of the supernatural had evolved to that of a tragic fateful power that overawes and overcomes its human victims. This power was conceived in crude, violent, gruesome or loathsome shapes,—

a power of demonry or of ghastly intrusion on life out of the unseen terrors of the other world. Wordsworth and Coleridge, impelled by deeper romantic ideas, gave to the conception an inwardness, the effect of which was, first, to shift supernaturalism from old legend to matters of intimate individual experience, and secondly, to orientate it from the mere sense of awe and wonder to a new psychological interest.

Apparently supernaturalism emerges with them out of the luridly sensational world of 'Monk' Lewis and the German school of horrors. But not only does it shed the violently morbid tendencies superimposed by an exotic and extraneous influence, but is also completely restored from its outworn mediaeval properties to a richer and deeper human import. Supernaturalism thus does not merely enter on a fresh phase of development with Wordsworth and Coleridge, but seems to undergo an inner process of renovation, becoming in effect what may be called a new supernaturalism. At any rate, the most central, the most significant and important phase of romantic supernaturalism is represented by them,—a phase set deeply and intimately, as we shall find, in the revivified Rousseauite conception of Nature, in the implicit idealism of the romantic outlook on life and in the peculiar quality and strength of romantic imagination. Of this phase Coleridge is the chosen exponent, as Scott is of the mediaevalistic and Lewis of the horror-romantic. Its early, yet full-blown and vernal flower, its most complete consummation and expression, is the

Ancient Mariner,—a poem unique in romantic poetry, both in its rounded perfection of expression and in its ' depths within depths ' of inward significance.

Of this new supernaturalism, the originating idea was evolved, as is well known, from the exchange and mingling of minds during the frequent conversations between Wordsworth and Coleridge in the summer of 1797. Their confabulations among the Quantocks have acquired in the perspective of history an epoch-making importance. But we know only their final terms and conclusions as recorded long afterwards in a somewhat matter-of-fact manner by Coleridge. Here, if anywhere, one longs, to use and adapt the words of Coleridge himself, for ' the drama of reason,' ' for the presentation of the thought growing, instead of a mere *hortus siccus*.'

In the light of historical context, however, it may be possible to see something of the motive behind the strikingly original plan conceived by them of " interesting the affections by the dramatic truth of emotions " in a kind of poetry which seems, by the very law of its being, to belong to a wholly different sphere of interest. The turn, which supernaturalism had taken during the immediately previous years, was decidedly in a direction away from all human interest. It was producing, specially in contemporary fiction and drama, grotesque crudities that shocked Wordsworth's sane literary taste* and

* " To this tendency of life and manners (*i.e.*, craving for extraordinary incident) the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the

sickened the critical mind of Coleridge.* A sort of human interest in the presentation of the supernatural had been present, at any rate sentimentally and superficially, in Scottish legendary poetry, but it seemed to be alien from the horror-romantic mode. To Wordsworth and Coleridge this must have been apparent, and what is particularly noticeable in the entirety of ' the idea in which originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads* ' is a feeling out for a fresh synthesis between nature and supernaturalism. In the poetry of Coleridge, this synthesis was finely achieved. But it must have passed through a theoretical sifting, which was not so much perhaps a logical as an inner intuitional process,—a matter of deeper and more searching romantic thought and feeling. It was Coleridge who brought the theory, shaped between Wordsworth and himself, of supernaturalism within the range of an entirely new art of dealing with the supernatural.

country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse."—Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (*Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 936).

* Extracts from a letter from Coleridge to William Bowles, published for the first time in Prof. Greever's *A Wiltshire Parson and his Friends*, are quoted by Mr. Livingston Lowes in *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 245. According to Mr. Lowes, it was ' certainly written before, but not much before, March, 1797.' The following passage of the letter is significant of Coleridge's attitude towards the literature of ' horrors ' : " But indeed I am almost weary of the terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for these last six or eight months. I have been lately reviewing the Monk, the Italian, Hubert de Sevrac, etc., etc., in all of which dungeons, and old castles, and solitary Houses by the sea-side, and Caverns, and Woods, and extraordinary characters, and all the tribe of Horror and Mystery, have crowded on me—even to surfeiting."

Nature and Supernaturalism

The value of the supernatural in life was arrived at by Wordsworth through the approaches opened by the doctrine of 'Return to Nature.' The difference between Wordsworth's earlier treatment of folk-superstitions in *An Evening Walk* and his later treatment of them shows how a new range of intuitions and feelings acquired a novel interest in the poet's mind. *An Evening Walk* was composed under the influence of the poetic tradition of the eighteenth century, and the description in it of the 'strange apparitions that mock the village sight,' at evening, of the spectral horseman and the shadowy display of pageantry is conceived in the conventional manner in which such supernatural touches are introduced in Thomson's *Seasons*.* Rustic superstition adds only a streak of realistic colour to a picture of rural life, but carries no implication of any aesthetic or ethical value. In later poems, however, *viz.*, *The Haunted Tree* and *The Wishing Gate*,

* See Thomson's description of the shepherd and the milkmaid returning home at evening (*Seasons*, Summer, ll. 1670-1680):

"Onward they pass o'er many a panting height,
And valley sunk and unfrequented, where
At fall of eve the fairy people throng,
In various game and revelry, to pass
The summer night as village stories tell;
But far about they wander from the grave
Of him whose ungentle fortune urg'd
Against his own sad breast to lift the hand
Of impious violence. The lonely tower
Is also shunn'd, whose mournful chambers hold,
So thought-struck fancy dreams, the yelling ghost."

superstition is presented in an entirely different light. The source from which this light was received is not difficult to locate.

One of the many significances, in which the romantic spirit accepted the Rousseauite doctrine of 'Return to Nature,' was the removal from the busy haunts of men to solitude and self-communion. It was exemplified by Rousseau himself when he withdrew into the Hermitage, where his sentimental *Reveries* was composed, turning the back on 'the copious torrent of pleasantry and remonstrance from the highly social circle who met round D'Holbach's dinner-table.'* The effect of solitude on his mind has been described by Rousseau himself in his *Confessions*. "The impossibility of reaching the real human beings," says Rousseau, "plunged me into the land of chimeras; and seeing nothing actual that rose to the height of my delirium, I nourished it in an ideal world which my creative imagination peopled with beings after my heart's desire."†

The fact, realised and recorded by Rousseau that imagination in solitude becomes creative of chimeras, is one perhaps of ordinary human experience. But to the poets of 'imagination' of the eighteenth century, the experience seemed to open, as we have seen, a magic casement, a new side of sensibility, recalling Browning's fine fancy in *One Word More* about the familiar moon turning a strange enchanted side to the moon-struck or moon-charmed mortal.

* Morley's *Rousseau and his Era*, Vol. I, pp. 223-24.

† *Confessions*, IX, 270-74 (see the *Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Eng. Trans., William Glaisher, Ltd., 1925, p. 352).

Their chimerical visions were horrors of ' ghostly shapes ' and ' aerial voices.' It was left to Wordsworth to perceive more finely the varied effects of solitude on the inner life of the mind,—in the evolution of mythology, in the shaping of superstitions which ' exalt the forms of Nature and enlarge her powers,' in tending the mind to experiences which border on the supernatural.

Man in solitude, according to Wordsworth, communes with Nature in various ways and to various issues, not the least important of which is creating out of the life of Nature forms of imaginary beauty or fanciful dread. The ancient Greek, standing face to face with Nature, filled her solitude with the beautiful creatures of pagan mythology.

" Once more to distant ages of the world
Let us revert,"

—says the Wanderer in the *Excursion* :

" .....and place before our thoughts
The face which rural solitude might wear
To the unenlightened swains of pagan Greece."
(Book IV, ll. 846-850.)

Between the Wanderer's philosophic interpretation of Greek mythology and Wordsworth's passionate lament in the sonnet, beginning ' The world is too much with us,' there is a fundamental community of idea. The primitive Greek, in his ideal ' land of hills, Rivers and fertile plains, and sounding shores, —Under a cope of sky more variable,' was helped

abundantly by his ' quick fancy ' in the solitude of Nature. The poet living in a sophisticated and materialistic age, which deadens imagination, envies the lot of the ancient Greek and longs for glimpses which would make himself, as the poet says, ' less forlorn.'

The shepherd lad, ' on thinly peopled mountains and wild heaths,' peoples the solitude with creatures of superstition. But even in his ignorant superstition the poet discovers an inherent value :

" And those illusions which excite the scorn
Or move the pity of unthinking minds,
Are they not mainly outward ministers
Of inward conscience? "

(*Excursion*, IV, ll. 834-837.)

The poet says further :

" Who would forbid them, if their presence serve,
On thinly peopled mountains and wild heaths,
Filling a space else vacant, to exalt
The forms of Nature, and enlarge her powers? "

(*Ibid*, IV, ll. 843-846.)

In *The Haunted Tree* and *The Wishing Gate*, Wordsworth celebrates two animistic superstitions. A huge ' time-dismantled oak ' stands in the midst of a wood and sends forth, ' above the general roar of woods and crags,' a creaking sound when swept by the wind, and the tree is believed to be haunted. Wordsworth imparts even to a vulgar belief like

this a certain beauty and dignity by pointing to its psychological origin. The sensibility of imagination that lay at the root of Greek mythology or the sensibility of heart that imagines Nature as mourning for the ill deeds of men,—so happily illustrated in the legends introduced by the poet at the end of *Hart-leap Well*,—exalts above vulgarity a superstition of this kind.* In the same way do the traditions connected with the ancient ruined gate, by the side of the old highway in Grasmere vale, gather significance and ripen slowly to a delicate cultural value in the poet's mind. The Wishing Gate is the centre and symbol of the tender susceptibilities that find so congenial a soil for growth in the unlearned simplicities of rural life. Human life itself would be but poor and forlorn without, what the poet calls, ' the superstitions of the heart ; '† and the natural beauty and loveliness of the spot seems to the poet to make a harmonious set-off for such an appealing superstition, for in a spot like that the mind is all too readily charmed to a mood of

* " As if (so Grecian shepherds would have deemed)
The Hamadryad, pent within, bewailed
Some bitter wrong. Nor is it unbelieved,
By ruder fancy, that a troubled ghost
Haunts the old trunk lamenting deeds of which
The flowery ground is conscious."

—The Haunted Tree.

† " Yet how forlorn, should you depart,
Ye superstitions of the heart,
How poor were human life!"

—The Wishing Gate.

acquiescence in the popular belief. So the poet is induced to ask :

" Then why should conscious spirits fear
The mystic stirrings that are here,
The ancient faith disclaim? "

In this sensibility,—the foster-child of nature and solitude,—which moulds the old Greek myths, informs the superstitions of shepherds and mountaineers, and inspires the animistic conceptions of simple village folk, Wordsworth discovers the root and origin of the supernatural experiences of individuals, touched by, what he calls, ' the Souls of lonely places.'

This sensibility prompted the poet's own weird experiences in boyhood which are described with a power of formless vagueness, unequalled except perhaps by Coleridge, in the birds'-nesting and boat-stealing episodes in Book I of *The Prelude*. Detached from the context and the peculiar significance arising out of it, the experiences are such as might find place in the novels of terror and suspense of the school of Radcliffe and Maturin :

" I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod."

(ll. 322-325.)

And,

" .....huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams."

(ll. 398-400.)

These experiences, which the poet in the fresh frankness of early youth connected more specifically with supernatural agencies in the earliest extant draft of *The Prelude*,* are attributed later to what he calls the ' severer interventions ' of Nature.

It is evident that the feeling which prompts the imaginary experience or the traditionary acceptance of the supernatural arises out of Wordsworth's category of ' elementary feelings,' and the trend of Revolutionary ideas lent to them a new dignity derived from sovereign Nature. In studying in the

* " Ah not in vain, ye Beings of the hills,
And ye that walk the woods and open heaths,
By moon and starlight, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood, did ye love to intertwine
The passions that build up our human soul
Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man," *etc.*

The Prelude, DeSelincourt's Ed.,

Book I, ll. 428-433, footnote, pp. 24-25.

In Part Third of *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth says with reference to the ' potent Spirits ' that ' play with sense and soul ; '

" Your presence often have I felt
In darkness and the stormy night;
And with like force, if need there be,
You can put forth your agency
When earth is calm, and heaven is bright."

(ll. 776-780.)

light of romantic imagination the various workings of this 'elementary feeling,' exalted and dignified by Nature, Wordsworth found, even within his rigidly limited sphere of 'naturalism,' that supernatural world, the intercourse and intimacy with which marks the cleavage between the old century and the new, the grey old rationalism and the new romantic outlook.* Both Wordsworth and Coleridge express in somewhat dry ratiocinative passages their settled conviction of the value of the mind's intimacy with the supernatural. The Wanderer in the *Excursion*, the mouthpiece of Wordsworth's own mature philosophy, says :

" .....rather would I instantly decline
To the traditionary sympathies
Of a most rustic ignorance, and take
A fearful apprehension from the owl
Or death-watch : and as readily rejoice,
If two auspicious magpies crossed my way;—
To this would rather bend than see and hear
The repetitions wearisome of sense,
Where soul is dead, and feeling hath no place;"

(Book IV, ll. 613-621.)

The power of superstitious fancy to 'unsensualise' the mind is spoken of by Coleridge in the *Destiny of Nations* in reference to the superstitions of the Laplanders and their 'terrible legends' :

" .....For Fancy is the power
That first unsensualises the dark mind,

* See Introduction, pp. 32-35.

Giving it new delights; and bids it swell
With wild activity; and peopling air,
By obscure fears of Beings invisible,
Emancipates it from the grosser thrall
Of the present impulse, teaching self-control,
Till Superstition with unconscious hand
Seat Reason on her throne."

(ll. 80-88.)

This perception of the supernatural within the natural,—of its value and its power 'to exalt the forms of Nature and enlarge her powers,'—which is so amply illustrated by the passages cited above,—must have existed in Wordsworth's mind (and also perhaps in Coleridge's) when, in the summer of 1797, they discussed the possibility of a synthesis in poetry between Nature and supernaturalism. The effect of this idea on their poetry is obvious and striking. A whole range of feelings, intuitions and sensibilities, long discounted as abnormal or pathological and touched with a certain morbidity in their expression in pre-romantic poetry, comes through their restoration to Nature into a new scale of romantic values.

Humanity and Psychological Interest of the Supernatural

These materials acquire a richer import and significance within the scope of the 'powers and privileges' of romantic imagination, and what the scope of these powers and privileges was to

Coleridge's mind appears, though veiled in metaphysical phraseology, from the concluding passage of Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*. In the passage in question, Coleridge, elaborating in terms of idealistic philosophy his conception of Imagination, relates to it in an implied manner the uses and principles of supernaturalism. After distinguishing between ' primary imagination ' and ' secondary imagination ' on one hand and between ' imagination ' and ' fancy ' on the other, Coleridge refers the reader to a projected ' critical essay on the uses of the Supernatural in poetry, and the principles that regulate its introduction ' to be prefixed to the *Ancient Mariner*, in which his further opinions on ' the powers and privileges of imagination ' were to be declared.* The projected essay shared the common fate of Coleridge's teeming literary projects. But it is evident that to Coleridge's mind the treatment of the supernatural in the *Ancient Mariner* was imaginative in a special sense in which its previous treatment in English poetry was not.

Imagination was identified, as we have seen, by poets and critics of the eighteenth century with a fine frenzy capable of ' bodying forth ' the unreal and supernatural. While its mere effervescence touches with luridness the imagery of the poetry of Thomas Warton and his followers, its more creative efforts bring forth only the forms of supernaturalism usual in legendary tales. The flesh-and-blood ghost comes forth ; the death-blow descends

* See Appendix IV.

from nowhere; mysterious transformations happen; spells and omens are miraculously fulfilled. But the Imagination, that Coleridge conceives of, has certainly no inherent tendency to the production of such gross incidents and concrete forms. What, then, were those 'powers and privileges' of imagination that Coleridge brought to bear on the treatment of the supernatural in the *Ancient Mariner*?

When he wrote the passage referred to above on 'primary' and 'secondary' imagination, Coleridge's mind was saturated with the idealism of German philosophy, and he echoes unconsciously, perhaps, a metaphysical distinction drawn by Schelling,* with whom, as with other German philosophers like Kant and Fichte, Coleridge was, as he describes himself, a 'fellow-thinker.'† Denuded of its metaphysical trappings, Coleridge's conception of Imagination is neither unique nor even uncommon in the critical thought and speculation of the romantic period. It embraces both life and art in the same creative principle,—making art not an artificial or cultured ability but a vital inner power. The faculty by which we have experience of the so-called phenomenal world is believed to be of the same nature or quality as that by which the artist 'dissolves,

* Mr. Shawcross in his note compares the passage with the opening words of Schelling's Introduction to *Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (see *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by Shawcross, Vol. I. p. 272).

† See *Anima Poetae*, p. 106 (His indebtedness to German Philosophy).

diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create' or merely 'idealises and unifies.' In one case, its activity is a primary one and in the other, only secondary, being a mere re-creative or idealising activity.

This 'secondary imagination' is not a mere metaphysical abstraction taken by Coleridge out of German transcendental philosophy, for the essential originating and organising power which it presupposes is posited of imagination by all romantic thinkers who have concerned themselves with the distinction between Fancy and Imagination. It is rooted in their critical perception, for imagination of this type is a 'plastic stress,' or 'esemplastic power,' as Coleridge calls it, in romantic poetry itself. The very stuff of real life, the tangible experiences of the senses, is re-created by the romantic poet on an ideal plane, by a process which involves what Matthew Arnold calls 'criticism of life.' It is the special activity which distinguishes romantic poetry in general, specially the work of the earlier generation of English romantics to which Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge belong. The humanity of their poetry is wholly different. The detached and abstract observations on life in the poetical 'essays,' 'epistles' and satires of the preceding century are replaced by an effort to see life and reproduce it more 'steadily and whole.' It is accompanied by an eager, inquisitive, impassioned interest in all phases of human experience, and the 'powers and privileges' of imagination direct poetry inevitably towards a definite human end. Even the treatment of the supernatural receives this direction and

assumes this new humanity. Quite away from the earlier process of merely concretising and visualising the supernatural, it is taken up as experience, as one of the many interests belonging to life and nature, as something without which the romantic vision of life must be partial and incomplete. Supernaturalism thus comes to be the study and expression of those forces, those 'potent Spirits' that Wordsworth speaks of in *Peter Bell* as playing oddly, yet inexorably, with 'sense and soul,' appearing in the shape of superstition to the mind or of supernatural experience to the senses.

The implicit idealism of Coleridge's mind imparts to this study a subtle tone of feeling, which, in Hood's description of the nature of his mind-wanderings in a haunted house, finds an intriguing lyrical expression :

> "It might be only on enchanted ground,
> It might be merely by a thought's extension:
> But in the spirit, or in the flesh, I found
> An old deserted mansion."
>
> (*The Haunted House.*)

Whether the experience is 'in the spirit' or 'in the flesh' is a standing query also in Coleridge's representation of the supernatural. The sense of dubiety, as of something half real and half illusory, which, as we shall see, has a vital bearing on the two principles of supernaturalism laid down by Coleridge, *viz.*, 'suspension of disbelief' and 'dramatic probability,' imparts a distinctive charm,

a new shade of artistic beauty, to his treatment of the supernatural, and this charm is evolved not by studied art but out of the haunting self-awareness of his own mind.

There is a curious note in *Anima Poetae* in which Coleridge describes how an object, present to the senses, may come to partake of a symbolical character to the inner mental sensation. Looking at the glimmering moon through a dewy window-pane, "I seem rather," says Coleridge, "to be seeking, as it were *asking*, for a symbolical language for something within me that already and for ever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have an obscure feeling as if the new phenomena were the dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature."* Now, if some ghostly or supernatural object were substituted for the familiar planet, the experience might be fundamentally of the same symbolical nature,—the inner and the outer seeming to respond deeply to each other, or, in higher intensity, to become two sides of the same entity. 'We receive but what we give,'—not only with regard to Nature, but also in respect of the supernatural world. "What is outness, external and the like," asks Coleridge, "but either the generalisation of apparance or the result of a given degree, a comparative intensity of the same?"† So even the ghost of Hamlet's father appearing on the plat-

* *Anima Poetae*, p. 136.
† *Ibid*, p. 279.

form at Elsinore, the long literary ancestry of which is but too well known, becomes in Coleridge's interpretation Hamlet's mental image of his father 'projected in higher intensity.'* Elsewhere in his lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge comments on the fact that the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Hamlet in its *third* visitation, thus gradually 'accreting objectivity,' yet 'retaining all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity.'† But Coleridge does not make the ghost a mere spectral illusion, for his surer critical instinct saves him from excesses of speculative criticism.‡ Now, the supernatural regarded in this way, philosophically and idealistically, passes out of a fixed or definite character, either of palpable objective reality or of purely subjective illusion. It can be characterised only as an experience at its face value which is delicately difficult to distinguish as inner or outer.

The 'reality' of the supernatural had been of the objective kind in previous treatment, but Coleridge aimed obviously at reality of a finer and more intangible kind. As we revert to the account given by Coleridge of the origin of the *Lyrical*

* "'I see it in my mind's eye,' exclaims Hamlet, when his thoughts were in his own purview: the same phantom, yea, in a higher intensity, became his father's ghost and marched along the platform."—*Ibid*, p. 279.

† "Add too, that the apparition itself has by its previous appearances been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This accrescence of objectivity in a ghost, that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity, is truly wonderful."—Coleridge's *Essays and Lectures*, Everyman's Library, p. 146.

‡ "Hamlet's own disordered fancy has not conjured up the ghost of his father; *etc.*"—*Ibid*, p. 475.

Ballads, we find at once how the whole conception of the new supernaturalism grows out of (*i*) the impact of romantic imagination on human experiences and (*ii*) the idealistic view of experience. Referring to the supernatural class of poems intended for inclusion in that work, Coleridge says: "In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real." To this, the proposition is significantly added: "And *real* in this sense they have been to every human being, who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency."* It is clearly the 'reality' of the idealist to whom the inner world of the mind and the outer world of the senses are one and undivided.

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Crabbe's *Sir Eustace Grey*† and Hood's *Dream of Eugene Aram*

* See Appendix IV (Collectanea—H).

† *Sir Eustace Grey*, like Wordsworth's *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, is plainly the poetic treatment of a medical case. As appears from Crabbe's own statement in the Preface to his Poems, 1807, the poet was harking back to the example of Shakespeare's study of insanity and intended to describe the wanderings of a partially insane mind. The case is clearly one of what is called the 'persecutory type of delusion,' due to 'dissociation of consciousness.' Its effect is thus described: "The mind of the individual would, in fact, suddenly be filled with a new series of ideas, while it would, at the same time, be altogether ignorant of the ideas which had occupied it a moment previously" (Hart's *Psychology of Insanity*, p. 46). Although the motive of *Sir Eustace Grey* is not the treatment of the supernatural, yet the stanzas describing the persecution by the 'ill-favoured ones'

all deal with the supernatural in this sense of 'reality,' and it is curious how the presentation of the supernatural takes thereby an entirely different and novel form. There is none of the concreteness or objectivity of the old legendary tale, but the finer, more stimulating effect of a tale of strange shadowy experiences undergone by an abnormally circumstanced individual, the central interest in which is removed from the mere wonder of the supernatural occurrences to their psychological bearings, the inward relations of the incidents to a mind that experiences and is affected by them. The interest in each of the three poems is evolved in a different way of imagination out of a state of mental obsession produced by a hard-pressed consciousness of guilt. But the supreme artistic subtlety of Coleridge's treatment consists, so to say, in a lowering of light over the landscape and throwing over it a shadow of dubiety, making the connection between the mental obsession and the outer experiences subtly indeterminate. The dividing line between the subjective and the objective is blurred, and how much of the hero's experiences is external and how much mere matter of inner feeling and perception becomes difficult, if not impossible, to assess.

Scott sometimes treats of the supernatural in terms of simple psychological reactions. In *Marmion* and *Rokeby*, he shows the reactions on the mind of the supernatural or of something believed

have the kind of interest that Coleridge desiderates, being the study of a mind that 'believes itself to be under supernatural agency' under pressure of a delusion.

to be so, and uses them as a more elaborate device in his novel, *Woodstock*, in which his object was, as he says, "to show the effect of supernatural fear upon the agents of the story,—one a man in sense and firmness, one a man unhinged by remorse, one a stupid, unenquiring clown, one a learned and worthy but superstitious divine." But the psychological interest, conceived superficially by Scott, has a fullness and inwardness of purpose and aim in Coleridge's treatment which turns the interest from mere exhibition of the effects of the supernatural on human conduct to an exploration of what is called 'soul-lore' by Walter Pater in reference to the *Ancient Mariner*.* In fact Coleridge, at the time the poem was composed, conceived of supernaturalism exactly as exploration of 'soul-lore' under the stimulus of the profound purpose that lay behind the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Coleridge, as we have observed, lays stress on the 'reality' of the supernatural, and in doing so, he brings his supernaturalism into direct line with what was settled between Wordsworth and himself to be the fundamental purpose of the *Lyrical Ballads*. This purpose was shaped, as we know, by some of Wordsworth's deepest spiritual experiences, the melancholy aftermath of his 'first, fine, careless rapture' in the Revolutionary cause. He emerged out of these experiences on what in *The Prelude* is presented as the final term of his mental growth, coinciding in time with the brief season jointly spent

* See Essay on Coleridge in the *Appreciations*.

with Coleridge near and among the Quantocks where the *Ancient Mariner*, the best part of *Christabel*, the *Idiot Boy* and *The Thorn* were composed. Addressing Coleridge towards the end of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says :

> " When thou dost to that summer turn thy thoughts,
> And hast before thee all which then we were,
> To thee, in memory of that happiness,
> It will be known, by thee at least, my Friend!
> Felt, that the history of a Poet's mind
> Is labour not unworthy of regard:
> To thee the work shall justify itself."
>
> (Book XIV, ll. 408-14.)

It is natural to ask what justification the tale of the poet's mental growth found in the work and activities of that season, and the answer leads us straight back to that moment in Wordsworth's spiritual life when, escaping from abstract systems of thought, he sought for and discovered a final refuge in imagination.

From this new sanctuary of his spirit, the analytic methods of scientific thought which had held him in their jaws for a brief spell appeared to him to be singularly obscurantist. They barred the approach to reality by interposing

> " .....a universe of death
> For that which moves with light and life informed,
> Actual, divine and true."
>
> (*The Prelude*, XIV, ll. 160-62.)

There is a whole series of passages in Wordsworth's poetry, from the light bantering of *The Tables Turned* and *A Poet's Epitaph* to the solemn strains of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, in which the unreal character of the abstract dissective methods of studying nature and life is exposed and ridiculed. Wordsworth, as Prof. Legouis says, "not only saw in imagination a vague presentment of true science, but joining her, as an auxiliary, he offered her the indispensable assistance of poetry as a means to the study of reality."* We shall presently observe the repercussions of the idea on the poetry and poetic methods of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But apart from it, it was the discovery of a revolutionary truth, which, after more than a century and a quarter, has received in our time its fullest confirmation even from the scientists themselves. In investigating the problem of reality, both science and philosophy have come full circle to the Wordsworthian view that the imaginative apprehensions of Nature and human life constitute a nearer approach to reality than the abstractions of science.†

* Legouis's *The Early Life of Wordsworth* (Eng. Trans.), p. 405. In writing this portion, I have derived much light from Ch. II (Wordsworth's Relation to Science) of Book IV of Prof. Legouis's work.

† I take the liberty of extracting the following passage from Joad's *Guide to Modern Thought* (Jan. 1933) which summarises the results of modern speculation on the subject:

"First, the method of science is not the only method of knowing things. Secondly, there are some things, beauty, for example, and humour, of which science is unable to give any account; yet these things are intensely important to us. Thirdly, in so far as things are known, it must be by some faculty other than scientific observation and reasoning. Fourthly, we have reason to suppose that the world that science studies is not the real world, but a selected or abstracted

The idea gave immediately a new orientation to Wordsworth's purpose as a poet. He set out to make poetry " the history or science of feelings,"* and Coleridge with his supernaturalism fell in immediately with the purpose, not consciously perhaps, but through his delicate responsiveness to and receptivity of the influence of Wordsworth at the time. This novel view of poetry throws light not only on much of the Preface, as it was originally written, to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's notes on his own poems, but also on his peculiar treatment of ' elementary feelings ' and ' essential passions ' which are produced as observed facts of mind or soul, their meaning and implication being left to the reader's sympathetic understanding. The ' appropriate business ' of poetry, according to Wordsworth, is to present things ' as they *seem* to exist to the senses and to the passions,'†

aspect of something that underlies it. This ' something other ' is not and cannot be known by the methods of science. It is plausible, therefore, to suppose that it is known by some method analogous to that by which we know beauty in art and humour in jokes. But just as we can describe neither beauty nor humour, so it is unfair to expect those who do in fact have knowledge of this reality that underlies the world of science to give a logical account of it.

" If we ask, then, how the reality is to be conceived, it is probable that we shall get a number of different answers varying with the personality of the answerer. It is a mathematician's mind according to Sir James Jeans, a universal mind-stuff according to Professor Eddington, an organic unity rather like a person according to Professor Whitehead, a stream or force of life according to Bergson.

" To this reality the approach is not through science but through art, through the appreciation of nature and above all through religion." —p. 104.

* Note on *The Thorn* written in 1800.

† Essay supplementary to the Preface (1815). See *Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 944.

and this ' seeming ' is regarded as integral part of reality : it is experience, fact of the mind, something of scientific or psychological value and interest. Coleridge's exploration of ' soul-lore ' is grounded likewise on the ' reality ' of the supernatural,—on what ' seems to exist to the senses and to the passions ' to an individual situated in circumstances beyond normal, commonsense experience. Poems of ' elementary feelings ' and ' essential passions ' like the *Idiot Boy*, the *Mad Mother*, the *Forsaken Indian Woman*, *We are Seven* and *Simon Lee* belong to the same orbit of imagination as poems on the supernatural like the *Ancient Mariner*, *The Thorn* and *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*. The psychology is essential and is a formative principle in all of them.

' *Suspension of Disbelief* ' *and* ' *Dramatic Probability* '

More important, perhaps, than the ideas which gave to supernaturalism a new orientation in the minds of Wordsworth and Coleridge towards nature, humanity and psychological purpose, are the new artistic principles on which it was resumed.

Coleridge recognised the existence of ' principles that regulate the introduction ' of the supernatural in poetry. The critical essay in which he had promised a discussion of these principles was probably never attempted, with the result to us that Coleridge's ideas on supernaturalism, intimately related as they must have been to the few unmatchable masterpieces

he has left to English poetry, have to be picked up brokenly from several dispersed and inchoate passages of his prose works. A tentative first attempt has been made in Appendix IV to the present work to bring these passages into relation and to integrate the ideas contained in them. But they easily crystallise round two principles mentioned by Coleridge himself as ' Suspension of Disbelief ' and ' Dramatic Probability.' The first connotes a mental attitude in the reader which the poet dealing with the supernatural must primarily aim at creating, and the second a matter of artistic dealing in order to produce, maintain and support this attitude. They are thus vitally interrelated or interacting principles, each contributing to the other in the final impression and total effect.

Coleridge's alert critical consciousness, allied to a keen power of logic, helped him to the deduction of an empirical principle from a common aesthetic experience. This experience,—one of a paradoxical nature,—was in fact well known and familiar to cultured minds, and it was realised, long before Coleridge, even by those who regarded supernaturalism as a lost and hopeless cause in poetry. Wordsworth declares that his own age is an age too late to listen with ' faith sincere ' :

" To tuneful tongues in mystery versed "

As when

" .....poets fearlessly rehearsed
The wonders of a wild career."

(Prologue to *Peter Bell.*)

Yet from his Cambridge days, when Spenser first rose on his mental horizon, moving vision-like 'through his clouded heaven With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,' to mature age when he sketched the character of Emily in the *White Doe of Rylstone* in the soft beauty and patient grace of Una, Spenser never ceased to be his favourite. Addison, outgrowing the youthful dogmatism in which he had declared that Spenser delighted 'an understanding age no more,' drew attention to and defended later the enchantment of Tasso's poetry.* We have referred in the Introduction to the hold of 'faery' Spenser, the Italian poets of chivalry, and even the tellers of knight-errantry tales who detailed with dreary prolixity 'the wonders of a wild career,' during the whole age of reason between Addison and Wordsworth.

The slow growth of a critical consciousness towards this aesthetic experience, so strangely at variance with opinions and beliefs, extends from Addison to Coleridge. With reference to Tasso's poetry, Addison remarked early in the eighteenth century: "We do not care for seeing through the falsehood and willingly give ourselves up to so agreeable an imposture," and his casual idea is followed up by Hurd who, after citing Addison's authority, declares in a tone bolder and more assured: "This criticism (*i.e.*, the philosopher's), whatever name it deserves, supposes that the poets, who are liars by profession, expect to have their lies

* *The Spectator*, No. 419.

believed. Surely they are not so unreasonable. They think it enough, if they can but bring you to imagine the possibility of them.....Does any capable reader trouble himself about the truth or even the credibility of their fancies? Alas, no; he is best pleased when he is made to conceive (he minds not by what magic) the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not and were never likely to exist.''* Hurd ends up with a distinction between ' philosophical and historical truth ' and ' poetical truth.' Coming later, when the perception of this distinction had perhaps grown stronger and clearer, Coleridge could deduce *a posteriori* from this outstanding experience of the aesthetic sense, recorded by critics and felt by literary minds, a principle of artistic dealing with the supernatural, *viz.*, that of ' willing suspension of disbelief.'

The idea, inherited by the Crocean aesthetics of our time, that the faculty which discriminates between truth and falsehood belongs properly to the world of practical experience and is out of place in that of the aesthetic experience poetry provides, leads straight to the problem,—how to isolate that experience so completely as to prevent the intrusion into its self-contained world of the scepticism or ' disbelief ' which is alien there? The difficulty of it is stated by Coleridge himself in his customary philosophical jargon: " That illusion, contradis-

* Letter X. *On Chivalry and Romance* (See Morley's Ed., pp. 135 ff.).

tinguished from *delusion*, that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment, is rendered impossible by their immediate neighbourhood to words and facts of known and absolute truth. A faith, which transcends even historic belief, must absolutely put out this mere poetic Analogon of faith, as the summer sun is said to extinguish our household fires.''* We shall observe later how, from Coleridge downwards, the romantic poets seek to solve the problem by artistic devices, intending to remove the supernatural incidents totally out of the sphere of normality or ordinary life, completely away in fact from all data on which reason may uprear the generalisation of ' probability.'

In passing from ' suspension of disbelief ' to ' dramatic probability,' the passage quoted above has a certain significance. It is evident from its somewhat fluctuating terminology that Coleridge was casting about for a positive and definite notion to express the mental condition ' in which the images presented could work by their own force.' It is nothing strange or surprising that the poet of *Kubla Khan*, a poem conceived so completely apart from any act of intellectual volition, should hold the intuitive belief that ' images and thoughts possess a power in, and of themselves, independent of that act of the judgment or understanding by which we affirm or deny the existence of a reality correspon-

* Quoted in Appendix IV (Collectanea—B).

dent to them.'* Coleridge, always keen on dream-phenomena, discovered that in 'the state of mind in dreams' this inherent power of images had full and unrestricted play. It is a state produced by the 'suspension of disbelief.' "It is not strictly accurate to say," remarks Coleridge, "that we believe our dream to be actual while we are dreaming. We neither believe it nor disbelieve it."† The success of a dramatic production does actually depend on the creation of 'the state of mind in dream' by means of stage-illusion and it is of the essence of the dramatist's art. A similar illusion, Coleridge felt, might be raised off the stage by a poet dealing with imaginary unrealities by 'dramatic probability' or, as he expands the idea, by 'transferring from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth.'‡ Like many of his predecessors in psychological speculation, he must have concerned himself earnestly with the ancient problem of psychology, *viz.*, the state of mind in dreams,—a problem that has engaged attention from the remote birth of psychological speculation with the primitive 'forest-sage' of Vedic India down to Freud and the Freudian psychologists of our day.§ But Coleridge the psy-

* See Appendix IV (Collectanea—A).

† *Ibid.* For more detailed treatment, see Appendix IV.

‡ See Appendix IV (Collectanea—H).

§ *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad*, Ch. II, Sec. I, 18 contains perhaps the oldest speculation in the world on the state of mind in dreams, *e.g.*, "When he the Conscious Spirit (*vijnānamaya Purusha*) is under the influence of Dream (*swapna*), all the external things are withdrawn; then it acts as an Emperor or as a great Brahmana, *etc.* It

chologist comes presently to the aid of Coleridge the poet, and psychology yields to poetry a principle of artistic dealing.

For the appreciation of the novel and original character of the *Ancient Mariner* as well as of the intimate connection of 'suspension of disbelief' with 'dramatic probability,' it is necessary to explicate what are but implicit suggestions in Coleridge. Considered as a tale, Coleridge's poem is radically different from all previous tales of the supernatural, not on account of its richer or finer artistic qualities, but because of its inner dramatic stress. And its supernatural incidents acquire from this very dramatic stress a different quality corresponding to what Leigh Hunt calls 'conditional truth to nature.'*

It is obvious that by presuming 'dramatic probability' or 'dramatic truth' in a supernatural tale, which, as we have seen, was conceived and supposed as a tale of one's intimate experiences, Coleridge implies the presence of an inner mental drama underlying and informing it. On the consistent character of this drama depends the whole power of illusion, of suspension of disbelief, for it is not difficult to see how the presence of it affects the supernatural elements of the tale. Involved in this inner drama, the supernatural incident neces-

enjoys itself in the body at will." From this ancient Sanskrit text to Freud's 'Interpretation of Dreams,' the distance of time is about twenty-seven centuries.

* See *infra*, p. 199. The phrase occurs in Leigh Hunt's essay on *What is Poetry*.

sarily appears shadowy and uncertain : its reality becomes largely relative and it scarcely lends itself to judgment on its own merits and apart from the situation imagined. The supernatural, shedding largely its supernatural marvel, raises only the kind of speculative wonder implied in Prof. Beers's intriguing queries about the Ancient Mariner's experiences, *viz.*, " Did the mariner really see the spectral bark, hear spirits talking, or was it all but the phantasmagoria of the calenture which attacks the sailor on the tropic main, so that he seems to see green meadows and water-brooks on the level brine? "*

A supernatural incident, again, occurring isolated and with no relation to any setting or background of dramatic interest,—' When, lo, a wonder ! ' as in the old romances,—has no inherent power of illusion to keep the ' meddling intellect ' at bay, but harmonised with the suggestion of a mood or the stress of an emotional mental state, it assumes another aspect.

In several passages of his poetry, Wordsworth conceives situations from which there seems to be but one single step to the actual experience of the supernatural. Joanna's laughter reverberating among the distant hills,† the pause of weird silence that follows the din of the owls' hootings and the boy's mimic hootings among the ' cliffs and islands ' of Winander,‡ the

* *History of English Romanticism in the 19th Century*, pp. 77-78.
† *To Joanna* (in ' Poems on the Naming of Places ').
‡ *There was a boy* (in ' Poems of the Imagination ').

'bowery loneliness' falling heavily at noontide on the great yew-trees in Borrowdale,*—strangely suggest the supernatural without actually evoking it. But between the suggestion of the supernatural and the actual evocation of it, the question is perhaps only of an intenser mental stress. In describing the mind's wanderings over the waste and wild solitude of a forsaken garden, Swinburne brings out in a sudden flash of intuitive feeling the stress of the unearthly mood and its conjuring power:

> "If a step should sound or a word be spoken,
> Would a ghost not rise at the strange guest's hand?"†

Such a mood is an elementary cell as it were, and the entire body of supernatural experiences may be organised out of such cells of sensation and feeling. The question of the 'probability' of such experiences precludes all other tests than the 'dramatic' one, casually mentioned by Coleridge in one of his letters: "In Tragedy we pronounce many things unnatural only because we have drawn our notions of nature from persons in a calm or only moderately agitated state, but in all violent states of Passion the mind acts and plays a part, itself the actor and spectator at once."‡

* *Yew Trees.*

† *A Forsaken Garden in the Poems and Ballads* (Second Series).

‡ The remark occurs in a passage in Coleridge's letter to Poole, dated from Göttingen, May 6, 1799. The letter is published in the *Letters*, ed. by H. Coleridge, pp. 295-300, but the passage in which the

We have referred already to Leigh Hunt's expressive phrase, 'conditional truth,' used by him in defending from the 'girds' of Hobbes the supernaturalism of Spenser and Ariosto. To call such supernatural creations as a flying horse, 'impossible' does not, according to Hunt, settle the question. "To the brazier they are impossible no doubt; but not to the poet." "The problem is, the creature being given, how to square its actions with probability according to the nature assumed of it."* Hunt's proposition, more widely interpreted, would cover the different kind of supernaturalism of Coleridge,—the supernatural treated dramatically as a matter of human experience and human psychology. The 'conditional truth to nature' in Spenser's or Ariosto's purely narrative treatment of the supernatural seems only to be the counterpart of 'dramatic truth' or 'dramatic probability' in the different treatment of it by Coleridge.

New Artistic Developments

From its theoretical reconception by Wordsworth and Coleridge, there is a fresh access of artistic vitality and refinement to supernaturalism in

remark and its context occur is expurgated. The passage is by way of comment on a tragical story involving murder and suicide which Coleridge relates in the letter. For the reference, I am indebted to Mr. Livingston Lowes (*Road to Xanadu*, p. 539) who consulted the original in the British Museum. The quotation is given on his sole authority.

* *Imagination and Fancy*, New Edition (1910), John Murray, p. 15.

English romantic poetry, and the earlier modes of it seem by comparison strangely bare and thin. From Coleridgean into post-Coleridgean supernaturalism, the artistic refinements are carried on and continued, and they are illustrated, perhaps, more amply from the poetry of the later romantics like Keats and Shelley, although the theories and principles of Wordsworth and Coleridge are of no use to the later generation of poets, with whom the supernatural is not a matter of imaginative treatment, but an element in the romantic imagination itself.

With Coleridge, English romantic poetry outgrows the bare, sheer supernaturalism of the mediaevalist poets or of the school of 'horrors': it comes to be clothed with an atmosphere without and filled with a new depth of meaning within. The atmosphere,—an old device new moulded and put to finer issues,—replaces from the point of view of artistic effect the traditionary mediaeval associations and a new richness of meaning and suggestion impregnates the mere awe and marvel of the supernatural.

The 'magic of atmosphere'

The principle of 'suspension of disbelief,' of putting the reader's mind from the outset into an attitude of acquiescence in and aesthetic acceptance of the tale, necessitates a special manner of presentation. The incidents have to be not only uncommon, but out of accord with common experi-

ence, and this tune of uncommonness is set by the 'atmosphere,' by the device of wrapping round the tale shades of such emotional feeling and apprehension as would make it appear alien from the world of known and normal things. The story is set in what is usually termed 'the magic of atmosphere.'

This magic, which appears perhaps for the first time in romantic poetry in *Christabel*, did not, however, come to Coleridge out of vacuum, for its possibility was latent already in the 'tales of terror' which, starting long before Coleridge, were to be found 'jostling on the road' even in Byron's youth.

Between the opening of Blake's *Fair Elenor*:

> "The bell struck one, and shook the silent towers,
> The graves give up their dead:"

—a mere feeble echo of Walpolean romance—and the opening of *Christabel*:

> "'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
> And the owls have awakened the crowing cock:
> Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!
> And hark, again! the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew!"——

followed up with a faint whispered suggestion of the dead coming out of the grave in the line, 'Some say, she sees my lady's shroud,' the difference is only as between crude ore and thrice refined gold.

Even in the *Adventures of Ferdinand*, one of the earliest precursors of the English novel of terror,

Smollett had chanced upon the device of atmosphere. His hero has to undertake a long journey part of which lies through a gloomy forest. He finds himself benighted and far from human habitations, and the situation and the feeling it evokes are thus described : " The darkness of the night, the silence and solitude of the place, the indistinct images of trees that appeared on every side, ' stretching their extravagant arms athwart the gloom,' conspired.....to disturb his fancy, and raise strange phantoms in his imagination.....His mind began to be invaded with an awful horror that gradually prevailed over all the consolations of reason and philosophy."* The thrill and suspense and trepidation of heart as in the presence of something supernatural, arising, however, out of perfectly natural surroundings, becomes a pretty regular thing in the novel of terror. It is exquisitely felt in Mrs. Radcliffe's description of the towers of Udolpho at the time when Emily approaches them in Montoni's company,—their looming ' Gothic greatness ' lit up by the sunset gradually dying away and leaving them in the darkness of evening, ' solemn, lonely and sublime.'† Jane Austen, who satirises this type of fiction, does not leave out of her satire the ' atmosphere ' of the terror-novelist. Henry, in his ironical account of Northanger Abbey with which he intends to work upon Catherine Morland's nerves, refers to the violent storm that

* Ch. XX (See *Ballantyne's Novelists' Library*, Vol. III, p. 41).

† *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ch. XVIII. (See *Ballantyne's Novelists' Library*, Vol. X, p. 325.)

will arise on the third night of her sojourn there, when ' its gusts will agitate one part of the hangings more violently than the rest.' Catherine experienced the storm, and she ' listened to the tempest with sensations of awe : and when she heard it rage round a corner of the ancient building, and close with sudden fury a distant door, felt for the first time that she was really in an abbey.' " Yes, these were characteristic sounds : they brought to her recollection a countless variety of dreadful situations and horrid scenes, which such buildings had witnessed and such storms ushered in."* Now, what had been mere crude conventional device with the novelists became supreme artistry in the hands of the romantic poets.

The atmosphere is employed by them variously and to diverse effects. The difference in its use and effect in Coleridge and Keats respectively almost leaps to the eye,—the slow and attentive elaboration of it in Part I of *Christabel* to raise and maintain a thrill of suspense and premonition, and the mere tone-modulation and word-echo evoking the dying autumnal tune to which the weird mediaeval story is set in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, or the suggestive subtlety in the *Eve of St. Agnes* to provide an exquisitely artistic contrast.

Distance from Commonsense and Experience

The ' suspension of disbelief ' is further aided by certain imaginative devices, initiated by Cole-

* *Northanger Abbey*, Ch. XX.

ridge and continued in dealing with the supernatural with fine artistic variations by his successors in the line. We may consider briefly the artistic advantage gained in regard to the supernatural incidents by the spatial or temporal remoteness of action and distance from all human experience in the *Ancient Mariner*, *Lamia* and the *Witch of Atlas*.

In Coleridge's poem, the venue of the ' crime ' is a forlorn ice-bound region where the only life that goes on is the vast undisturbed life of Nature. Of this life, the Albatross seems to be a visible portion, and the slaying of the bird which would be a small act of thoughtless cruelty in different surroundings reaches in that latitude of the globe the enormity and magnitude of an outrage on Nature's inviolate self. The incredible disproportion between the ' crime ' and the ' punishment ' is resolved and the terrible, far-flung ' spectral persecution ' by an offended agent of Nature becomes at any rate plausible. In Keats's poem, the whole weird story of witchcraft, transformation, enchantment and fatal disillusionment is evolved out of the suggestive background of a semi-mythological age to which magic and metamorphosis were normal incidents. A similar background is set in Shelley's poem, and all the visionary exploits and excursions of the Witch of Atlas, even apart from the intended symbolism, become credible for a daughter of one of the Atlantides. The inner logic in these poems is so consistent and complete that not for a moment is our ' poetic faith ' allowed to be shaken or disturbed.

The bafflement of commonsense standards is

intended also by the introduction, as an ingredient in the tale, of the action of forces imperfectly accounted for by science and regarded commonly as mysterious or occult. They are forces mostly potent in the region of the mind and creative of hallucinations or delusions,—discharged upon the mind from outside by superior will, hypnosis or animal magnetism, or latent in its unconscious depths as ' fixed ideas ' and irrational beliefs. These materials, which lie just outside the orbit of normal or common experience, lend themselves to supernaturalism in a peculiar manner, specially in Coleridge's poetry. In Wordsworth's long and uninspired doctrinal poem, *Guilt and Sorrow*, the gibbet in the desert is introduced in too crude a fashion to produce any effect at all, but the persecution by the ' ill-favoured ones ' in Crabbe's *Sir Eustace Grey* stops short of a genuine supernatural thrill only because its origin in the delirious brain is already disclosed and known. The sphere of illusions and hallucinations belongs to the domain not of supernaturalism but of abnormal psychology ; but it is through a partial suppression of the scientific interest, of the psychological explanation, that Coleridge achieves a subtle bafflement of the critical attitude towards the supernatural incidents of his poetry which partake more perhaps of an illusory or hallucinatory character.

The attempts to evoke responses from the irrational parts of our mind with suggestions of superstitious fears, and the presentation of the supernatural as the ' bodily fulfilment of unbodied fear,'

are also devices for creating the necessary distance from rationalising commonsense. Through deep-lying mental associations, the mind of the reader is shifted from its fixities in normal experience to the intuitive expectation of a supernatural presence. The plausibility becomes too strong for the irrelevant sense of reality to assert itself, and this is how Geraldine appears in *Christabel*. The poet lays with deliberate, but almost imperceptibly delicate touches, a train of associations leading towards something weird and uncanny, and when Geraldine turns up on the scene, 'like a lady of far country,' betraying no hint at first of her character in her talk or person, she has already absorbed the atmosphere of supernatural fear. Her sudden appearance from behind the forest-oak connects itself, almost magnetically, with the lurking influences that seem to trouble the midnight rest of birds and beasts and make all Nature uneasy.*

The Human Note and its Artistic Effect

The most distinctive and characteristic quality of the supernaturalism of Wordsworth and Coleridge was imparted to it, as we have already seen, by the Romantic Movement itself with its imaginative concentration on the themes cast up by the ferment of French Revolutionary ideas,—of man and of Nature in her manifold relation to man. Bringing his survey of 'Romantic Triumph' to a close,

* See Part V (under *Christabel*).

Omond asserts that "more than aught else, perhaps, the Romantic Movement stood for humanity in its widest sense, made man as man the theme of central interest."* True generally with regard to the stage of the romantic movement represented by Wordsworth, it is true also in a special sense of the mode of supernaturalism initiated by Coleridge. Its outstanding note is that of humanity.

The enrichment of tone and feeling, which the Coleridgean phase of supernaturalism gains from its human note, is shown most convincingly by its contrast with a later phase of supernaturalism, brought into prominence during the last decade of the nineteenth century by the so-called 'Celtic revivalists' like 'A.E.' and Yeats. It has acquired in English literary history, for its curiously shadowy crepuscular quality, the name of Celtic Twilight, borrowed from the title of one of Yeats's works. Its imaginative pre-occupation is neither with the terror of the supernatural nor with its human or psychological interest, but with its less comprehensible aspects—its mystical allurements, its far-off beckoning beauty. The supernatural with the Celtic poets rests on no solid ground of imagination, but floats in a sort of coloured vapour, as it were, which changes fluctuantly to every 'vary and gale' of the aesthetic temper. Coleridge's art of supernaturalism was set firmly on the 'reality of the supernatural,' but with the Celtic revivalists the unreality of the supernatural develops to a

* *The Romantic Triumph*, p. 400.

studied unrealism, with little more substantial to hold on to than ghostly landscapes, fairy life, and strange traffickings between the earth and regions unearthly. Yeats's early Celtic-mythological poem, the *Wanderings of Oisin*, a 'rathe primrose' of the Celtic movement, is perhaps a typical poem of the school.* But, while the supernatural imagination in Yeats's poem seems to drift beyond all moorings and soundings in human life, Wordsworth and Coleridge find for it an anchorage in life's deeper moral verities. Supernatural experiences with the latter become not mere wonders and things of 'faery,' but deeply meaningful, symbolical or suggestive.

Perhaps the finest illustration of this occurs in the *Ancient Mariner* in the incident of the dropping off of the dead albatross from the Mariner's neck, which, from one point of view, is release from a spell, while from a different one, is the consummate symbol and summary expression of the whole moral idea of the poem. The thought expressed lyrically in the lines of Browning:

> "O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
> And knowing this, is love, and love is duty."
>
> (*A Guardian Angel.*)

has the fullness and poignancy of dramatic exposition in this single incident of Coleridge's poem.

* *The Wanderings of Oisin and other Poems* was published in 1889. The leading poem on Oisin in the volume is a narrative which combines Celtic supernatural legends about the hero, a sturdy old pagan who comes back after long sojourn in fairy-land to revisit his country, estranged to him now by its recent conversion to Christianity.

What finds active expression in joy 'in widest commonalty spread' and what found palpable embodiment in the bird's joyful life,—the Beauty of all Life,—is pressed home to the Mariner's inner consciousness by throwing it into startling relief. This beauty blooms suddenly, in contrast with the hideousness of death around, even in the loathsome crawling creatures of the deep. The Mariner blesses them 'unaware,' for they are happy *living* things, and the wanton destruction of life in the albatross is atoned for by the benediction on life in the sea-snakes.

This distinctive human interest, arising out of that inherent and pervasive quality of English romantic poetry which Matthew Arnold, its champion and interpreter to the later Victorian age, made the touch-stone of *all* poetry and formulated as 'criticism of life,' is turned by Coleridge to a subtler, finer effect. The human note becomes a master-stroke of art at the conclusion of the *Ancient Mariner*. By the resurgence of the natural human interest at the end of the poem, the whole series of supernatural occurrences is thrown into a strange retrospect. The reader is landed at a point of vantage from which the supernatural experiences of the hero can be viewed apart, and they show themselves, viewed thus from a distance, curiously evanescent and illusory. A mist, a dream-like dubiety, seems to swallow them up.

In one of the supernatural stories of Rabindranath Tagore, a device is employed for the same artistic effect. The story describes the wonderful

experiences of a man in a lonely and deserted palace of pleasure, built two and a half centuries ago in the sumptuous Mughal days of yore. The palace had seen within its walls the splendid lusts and cruelties of the imperial harem, and now 'the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes made its every stone thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up like a famished ogress any living man who might chance to approach.' At night the deserted palace becomes alive with the ghosts of long-dead Mughal revelries,—ghostly laughters of bejewelled maidens, tinklings of anklets on viewless feet, unearthly music of guitars struck by invisible hands. The man comes completely under the exquisite supernatural spell, and the haunted palace seems like 'a living organism digesting him by the action of some stupefying gastric juice.' 'The intangible, inaccessible, unearthly vision' appears to him to be the only reality in the world,—and all else a mere dream. But the vision comes only of nights when the spell thickens, and with morning it is snapped. This is how the snapping of the spell is described :*

"I saw that day had dawned, and Meher Ali was going round and round the palace with his usual cry ('Stand back! Stand back! All is false!') in that dreadful weather. Suddenly it came to me that perhaps he also had once lived in that house, and that, though he had gone mad, he came there every day, and went round and round, fascinated by the weird spell cast by the marble demon.

* *Hungry Stones and Other Stories* (trans. from Bengali, Macmillan), p. 23.

" Despite the storm and rain, I ran to him and asked : ' Ho, Meher Ali, what is false? '

" The man answered nothing, but pushing me aside went round and round with his frantic cry like a bird flying about the jaws of a snake, and made a desperate effort to warn himself by repeating : ' Stand back ! Stand back ! All is false ! All is false ! ! "

Here we have a device, brought *ex machina*, to restore the mind to a point from which the falsity of the supernatural experience may appear in retrospect. Coleridge achieves the same final effect, without the aid of any extrinsic device, by simply bringing the Mariner at the end out of the spell in which he seems visibly to re-involve himself in reviewing his weird experiences, as indicated by the wedding-guest's startled exclamation, ' I fear thee, ancient mariner ! ' We perceive the return to his normal self and the final re-emergence of natural human interest in the Mariner's weary words :

" O, wedding-guest ! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea :
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

O, sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company ! "

(Part VII, sts. 19 and 20.)

And in this chastened and humanised mood all his inhuman experiences on the fateful voyage become vague, unreal and illusory to him, and he can pick out of them only one suggestion that comes home to his normal, natural self,—the simple moral :

> " He prayeth well who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast."
>
> (Part VII, st. 22.)

The simple humanity and everydayness of the moral, appearing so curiously inadequate if regarded as a summary expression of the effect of the whole, coming at the end of the poem, has this effect that it makes all the supernatural incidents seem misty and uncertain. The Mariner had shot the albatross and underwent terrible experiences in consequence. But if the experiences came only to enforce the moral truth on his mind, one may well wonder if they were real happenings at all and not the projections of a distorted mind, the painful prolongation of ' the spot upon the brain which will show itself without.'

But apart from this special use of it in refining the supernatural out of a concrete or objective character, the total artistic effect of the introduction of the human interest or the ' natural ' element is felt at once by considering for comparison a few specimens of supernatural poetry from which it is deliberately excluded. We become conscious at once of an impoverishing loss of subtlety and complexity, although other qualities may be evolved.

One such poem, during the literary period under review, is Hogg's *Kilmeny*, one of the stories strung together in the *Queen's Wake*. The poem is suffused with that elfin Celtic unrealism, centring in a mysterious hide-and-seek between the earth and 'the land of faery,'—the old motive of the legends of Tamlane in ballad and romance, revived and renewed by the Celtic Revivalists.* But the theme turns on a single inelastic note incapable of much artistic variation, *viz.*, the lure of the fairy world. Hood's *Elm Tree*, which will be noticed in a later part of this work, carries on through its indistinct and grotesque dream-like imagery a low suggestive monotone in which the forest's hidden pulse of life comes throbbing up and sinks dying down,—'sometimes murmurs overhead And sometimes underground,'—making us feel that the trees are no 'senseless things of wood':

> "But conscious, moving, breathing trunks
> That throb with human blood!"

But without any such 'humanised' treatment as the theme receives in Wordsworth's *Nutting*, the feeling becomes a mere sensation, sounding peculiarly hollow. Coming to later poetry, Rossetti's *Eden Bower* or *Sister Helen*, in which a note of human passion is struck, we see how the absence of the Coleridgean 'soul-lore' results in a certain loss of artistic complexity. The poems become mere exquisite thrillers, carrying on vibrations in crescendo

* *e.g.*, Yeats's *The Land of the Heart's Desire.*

of one terrible overmastering passion. In recent English poetry, Walter de la Mare's *The Listeners* is one of the most finely imaginative of supernatural poems. It presents a deserted and ruined house in a desolate moon-lit spot, which ghosts have made their dwelling and into which a lonely lost human voice suddenly penetrates, deepening the weirdness of the listening silence of voiceless phantoms startled by 'that voice from the world of men.' The most striking feature of the poem is its absolute break of contact with life and reality,—a sudden syncope as it were of all human thought or feeling. In such poems, in which supernaturalism is deliberately detached from contact with human realities, the suggestive and imaginative qualities may be of an extremely fine order, but they still appear thin and bloodless by the side of a poem like the *Ancient Mariner*, so rich in its psychological complexity and so profoundly meaningful in its relation to human life.

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PART V

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

(1798—1820)

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Common Ground between Wordsworth and Coleridge

It is obvious that the supernaturalism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, at any rate in its theoretical conception and speculative principles, has more than a mere superficial or adventitious relation to romanticism. Its fundamental or originative idea, as we have seen, is involved in the romantic conceptions of Nature and man; its peculiar form as a tale of human experiences,—of the mind and also of the senses acted upon by the mind,—is determined by the humanity and idealism of the romantic imagination. The conventional opposition between naturalism and supernaturalism seems, so far as the poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* is concerned, to lose much of its point and trenchancy. An inadequate appreciation of this fact leads to the sense of incongruity felt by a critic of our day about the place of the *Ancient Mariner* in that work.*

* "The *Ancient Mariner* is a different story; but the *Ancient Mariner* is a strange book-fellow for the rest of the volume. It is supernatural as opposed to the natural, and its very greatness depends on a defiance of the cardinal principles which Wordsworth was to lay down in the Preface to the second edition of the *Ballads*." ——Herbert Read's *Wordsworth* (Clark Lectures, 1929-'30), pp. 143-144.

But the poem has an obverse and a reverse side. While it is romantic in the glamour it catches from the distant, the strange and the weird, it is romantic also in its peculiar stress on nature even in the treatment of the supernatural theme. That is Nature in the Rousseauite sense, latent in the 'essential passions of the heart' and the 'elementary feelings,' the exploration and discovery of which was the avowed object of Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads*.*

On the intimacy between naturalism and supernaturalism in this phase, a significant commentary lies in the existence of a large common ground in poetic practice between Wordsworth and Coleridge. It means not merely that Wordsworth introduces supernatural elements into his professed poetry of nature and man, or that Coleridge gives us 'touches of nature' in his supernatural poems. But their divergent processes of imagination have the same starting ground, that of nature and humanity, from which the one proceeds towards

* "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated;.....lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted.....because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because.....being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions."——Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

nature and the other towards the supernatural. The psychological elements that Wordsworth associates specifically with nature are converted by Coleridge to the use of supernaturalism, and the imaginative effects which with Coleridge make the very stuff and substance of the supernatural are used by Wordsworth also in his treatment of external nature.

Taking his stand on Hartley's 'associationist theory,' Wordsworth attempts to show in the moods of 'essential passion' and 'elementary feeling,' depicted in a few poems of the *Lyrical Ballads*, how ideas happen to be associated in a state of excitement :

"My child! they gave thee to another,
A woman who was not thy mother.
When from my arms my Babe they took,
On me how strangely did he look!
Through his whole body something ran,
A most strange working did I see;"
(*The Forsaken Indian Woman*, st. iv)

"Another still! and still another!
A little lamb, and then its mother!
It was a vein that never stopped—
Like blood-drops from my heart they dropped."

And

"To wicked deeds I was inclined
And wicked fancies crossed my mind;
And every man I chanced to see,
I thought he knew some ill of me:"
(*The Last of the Flock*, sts. vii and viii)

" A fire was once within my brain;
And in my head a dull, dull pain;
And fiendish faces, one, two, three,
Hung at my breasts, and pulled at me.
But then there came a sight of joy;
It came at once to do me good;
I waked, and saw my little boy,
My little boy of flesh and blood; "

(*The Mad Mother*, ll. 21-28)

Such moods are curiously distinctive and are scarcely reproduced in romantic poetry outside the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge. They seem to balk at the slightest involvement or sophistication of thought and are so elemental in character. Of such elemental moods, there is a series and succession in the *Ancient Mariner*,—moods likewise of ' essential passion ' and ' elementary feeling,' induced by mental excitement.

Thus in Part III of the poem, the poet presents the mariners' violent alternation of hope and delirious joy and blank dejection and despair (sts. 5 and 6) ; in Part IV, the sense of absolute overwhelming desolation that seizes on the Mariner on the ship becalmed with its load of corpses on the uncharted sea (sts. 3 and 4), and again in the same part the sudden outburst and outwelling of love at the startling revelation of the beauty of life in the very midst of universal death (st. 14) ; in Part VI, the tremulous fearful joy of the long-lost wanderer at sea at the glimpse of familiar landmarks (st. 14) ; and lastly in Part VII, the passionate yearning of a

guilt-obsessed mind to be shriven and cleansed of blood.

The moods depicted by Wordsworth, compared with those set forth by Coleridge, show their similarity and difference at once. They bear on the face of them the common stamp of nature in its utter elemental simplicity, but the somewhat low and subdued tones of Wordsworth, harmonised no doubt with the narrative setting, are raised to higher stress and even to the pitch of ecstasy by Coleridge for dramatic effect. In Wordsworth's poems, such moods simply carry on and illustrate the sallies and workings of human nature, and it is curious how the 'state of excitement' they are supposed to reflect presses into the mental associations ideas strange, uncanny and weird. In Coleridge's poem, however, they have a definite purpose beyond illustration of nature. They carry us from point to point in the psycho-supernatural drama: it is through them that the supernatural forces of destiny, always in process in the tale but coming only fitfully and intermittently into view, make themselves felt in both their increasing and their relaxing tensions.

Turning to the treatment of external nature, we observe how certain aspects of nature exhibited by Wordsworth lend themselves effectively to Coleridge's supernaturalism. In them, Nature appears weird or unfamiliar, 'informed with fantasy,' by simply changing her aspect and complexion, but not her essential properties. This note in Wordsworth's treatment of nature may be called, for the sake of distinction, the 'supra-

natural' note, and the poet plays upon it with various stress, raising it, however, only to the verge of a supernatural effect.

Only a slight pressure upon it gives such a strange turn to the description in *The Prelude* of the old broken-down soldier leaning all alone against a mile-stone and looking 'ghastly' in the moonlight.* The effect of the piece is well expressed by Prof. Bradley who remarks: "His shadow proves he was no ghost; but a ghost was never ghostlier than he."† In the *Yew Trees*, the supra-natural note has a higher pressure. The scene under the 'sable roof of boughs,' red-brown with 'sheddings from the pining umbrage,' suddenly becomes thrillingly alive and charged with preternatural possibilities. Yet the 'ghostly shapes' that are conjured up there are no supernatural beings: they are dim apprehensions of a sensitised mind, unshaped by thought, stepping out of the subjective world as it were and standing out shadowily for a moment like evanes-

* "No living thing appeared in earth or air,
And, save the flowing water's peaceful voice,
Sound there was none—but, led an uncouth shape,
Shown by a sudden turning of the road;
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....From his lips, ere long,
Issued low muttered sounds, as if of pain
Or some uneasy thought, yet still his form
Kept the same awful steadiness;—at his feet
His shadow lay, and moved not.

——Book IV, ll. 385-408.

† *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Wordsworth), pp. 137-138.

cent apparitions. From these ' ghostly shapes ' to those thrills and terrors in the passages of *The Prelude* referred to in the previous part,*—the ' low breathings,' ' the sounds of undistinguishable motion,' ' the silent steps among the solitary hills,' the black and huge peak, ' as if with voluntary power instinct,' uprearing its head and striding ' with purpose of its own and measured motion like a living thing,'—there is a nearer approach to the supernatural, though the way is through the same subjective world.

Wordsworth seems to have seen further possibilities in Nature thus informed with fantasy, and he tries, though, as we shall see later, with singular unsuccess, to press it into his experiment with the supernatural in *Peter Bell* (*e.g.*, ll. 501-515; 483-485; 681-690). But Coleridge draws from it some of the best and most exquisite effects of the supernatural in both the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. Much of the imagery and incidents of nature in the latter poem, intended collectively to raise the haunted atmosphere in which the story opens, is but Nature informed with fantasy,—the howl of the mastiff suggesting some unseen spectral presence near by, the uncanny aspect of the nocturnal sky, the fantastic dance of the 'one red leaf,' all having their real and observed counterparts in entries in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*. Much of the imagery of sea-scapes and sky-scapes in the *Ancient Mariner* also is of the same character, showing the shifting panorama of Nature

* See Part IV, pp. 174-175 *supra*.

charged everywhere with a kind of supernatural activity.*

The antithesis between Wordsworth as the poet of Nature and Coleridge as the poet of the supernatural does not really involve mutual exclusion of poetic purpose and method. It is true that between Wordsworth's poetic vision restoring to a higher sense of reality Man in his 'earth-bound passions' and Nature in her 'outward shows of sky and earth,' and Coleridge's of Man as the victim of supernatural forces and mental obsessions and of Nature charged with a thousand strange hints of weirdness and enchantment, the divergence is wide enough. Yet the naturalism of Wordsworth and the supernaturalism of Coleridge are linked together not only by the conception of the supernatural as mainly a matter of psychology and mental experience, but also by a large part of poetic practice, involving the treatment of both inner human nature and the aspects of external nature appearing to excited or emotional moods. Perhaps from the kind of supernaturalism, human and psychological, which Coleridge represents, Wordsworth never really detached himself.

The fantastic Prologue to *Peter Bell*, reminiscent, as Prof. Legouis has shown,† of the Eagle and Aerial Flight machinery of Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*, is usually interpreted as representing symbolically the parting of the ways of imagination between Wordsworth and Coleridge. But the

* See *infra* for detailed treatment, pp. 239-240.

† *The Early Life of Wordsworth* (Eng. trans.), pp. 431-432.

suggestion, in spite of high authority, may be hazarded that the Prologue is not so much the poet's manifesto of realism against supernaturalism, as of supernaturalism brought within the range of nature and humanity. The significance of the allegorical action may lend itself to this interpretation as well. The poet's skiff first wafts him aloft into starry regions,—but the 'homesick loon' has left his heart at home and is perchance overcome by the music of the spheres. Seeing that the earth is his proper habitat, the skiff proposes to afford him, in stead of starry wonders, the charms of the remote, the unknown, the elfin, the magical, which 'these nether precincts do not lack.' But the poet reminds his guide and conveyer that, though 'temptation lurks among his words,' the world is too sleepy and the age too late for appreciation of these charms. The symbolism may, therefore, stand thus: the skiff represents the poet's supernatural imagination which has power to carry him into many different spheres of supernaturalism. There are the starry wonders, the sublimities of primitive nature-myths; the 'wonders of a wild career,' the mediaeval knight-errantry romance; the marvels of distant or unknown regions which Southey a few years later was to import into English romantic poetry; also the magic and mystery of the old legends of 'faery.' But, besides these types of supernaturalism which the poet deems to be inconsistent with the mentality of the modern age, there lies a further possibility in psychology. A similar charm, a 'potent rod,' a 'strong spell' may issue out of the mysterious workings of the human

mind and heart. Thus interpreted the Prologue finds straightway its commentary in the dedicatory epistle written long afterwards to Southey in which the poet 'makes his peace with the lovers of the supernatural.'

Wordsworth

Supernatural Elements in his Treatment of Humble Life

We shall deal later on with this theoretically conceived and ill-compounded poem with its mixture of different poetic *genres*, which Prof. Raleigh aptly calls 'Wordsworth's *Ancient Mariner*,'*—a poem which, in spite of the poet's self-satisfaction over its composition and Coleridge's uncritically generous appreciation,† remains 'the best-abused poem in English.' But quite apart from it and its misconceived theory, Wordsworth in a few of his poems on 'humble and rustic life' touches upon the supernatural in different ways, failing, however, to bring out any real supernatural effect. His powers, having no sure steadiness of direction towards the supernatural, are curiously crossed by a difference of motive or a certain matter-of-factness of conception or a lack of imaginative fusion. The *White Doe of Rylstone*, which has been already noticed, stands in a wholly different line.‡

* *Wordsworth*, p. 74.

† Coleridge considered it to be a 'most wonderful and admirable poem.' See *Anima Poetae*, p. 147.

‡ See *supra*, pp. 114-118.

Lucy Gray is informed with Wordsworth's 'inspired simplicity' and appears on a cursory view to be a slight and slender, a mere children's poem. But with all its seeming naïvete, the final impression it leaves on the mind is one of highly artistic quality. Against a looming background of Nature, formed by a wide desolate moor backed by frozen hill-sides, we glimpse a feeble going-on of life, a brief anxious agitation, a tragedy and heart-break,—all seeming to merge quickly and get effaced in the vast blank wintry stillness and silence. Little Lucy disappears among the mountain-snows in a storm, but is yet not lost altogether, for her apparition is seen on the lonesome moor tripping along happy and gay as in life. The little supernatural touch is so lightly, so tenderly and gracefully added that its effect is not to evoke any feeling connected with the supernatural at all, but only to refine Lucy into a thing that death could not touch. Stepping so airily from human life into the supernatural world, she seems but a 'glacial elf,' 'a fairy or imp of frost and storm,'* who only strayed into human life for a little while.

While in *Lucy Gray* the supernatural element does not yield its usual effect,—such as one may find in a legendary tale to which the poem through its formal idea has a spurious sort of affinity,—

* See Prof. Garrod's *Profession of Poetry and other Lectures* (Wordsworth's Lucy), p. 86.——"When I read the piece now, I am affected before all by the supernatural wintriness of it, as of some Elf-land winter. There is just a frozen stillness, in which is momentarily descried, only to be lost at once, the figure, not of any human child, but of some glacial elf, some fairy or imp of frost and storm."

because of the merging of the supernatural in a different motive, the effect is largely nullified in *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* by the matter-of-fact manner of treatment. The weird suggestion of tragedy in the poem, brought in by a flash, in the lines :

> " The cold, cold moon above her head,
> Thus on her knees did Goody pray:
> Young Harry heard what she had said:
> And icy-cold he turned away."
>
> (ll. 101-4)

gets irrevocably lost in the limpingly pedestrian style of the narrative. The supernatural appears crudely as an obtrusively visible and somewhat ludicrous effect without any hint of the occult process of its realisation. The poet tried to gloze over this deficiency by an absurd explanatory note,* but it comes out prominently by a comparison of the poem with Coleridge's *Three Graves* which deals more effectively with the same theme of the supernatural effects of a curse. The matter-of-factness of Wordsworth's mind, ' the clinging to the palpable ' on which Coleridge remarked to Hazlitt and

* In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd Ed. (1800), there was a passage on the poem, deleted in subsequent editions, in which the poet said that he wrote *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* because he " wished to draw attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous." " The truth is an important one," he added, " the fact (for it is a *fact*) is a valuable illustration of it." The anecdote, as is well known, was taken by Wordsworth from Darwin's *Zoonomania*, a scientific work in which it appears as a medical case.

the effects of which on his poetry he analysed in a passage of *Biographia Literaria*,* could conceive only of the grotesque outward effect of the curse. But in Coleridge's poem the curse passes into the realm of the mind, haunting the victims with its slow sinister influence and acting as a lingering mysterious blight on three innocent lives.

The supernatural note in *The Thorn* is more effective, perhaps because of its suggestive quality. The poem is a tragic tale, reminiscently told, though with nothing of the dramatic significance Wordsworth wished to be read into it, of abnormal passion and disaster in humble life. Its lurid wildness, both of Nature and of the tragic human figure standing out against it, is shot through with a few weird suggestions of horror, *e.g.*, the mingled wind-swept cries of the living and the dead coming on wintry nights from the mountain-top (st. xv), the moss remaining red-spotted with the slain infant's blood (st. xx), the mysterious stirrings of the mossy hill and the grassy plot around (st. xxi), and, most significant and suggestive of all, the shadow of a baby's face outlining itself on the pond, where

> "Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain
> The baby looks at you again."
>
> (st. xx)

* Coleridge's remark was quoted by Hazlitt in *The Liberal*, III, p. 39 in *My First Acquaintance with Poets*. See Zeitlin's *Hazlitt on English Literature*, p. 293. For Coleridge's analysis of the effects of Wordsworth's 'matter-of-factness' on his poetry, see *Biographia Literaria* (ed. by Shawcross), Vol. II, pp. 103 ff.

The supernatural suggestions merely serve to heighten the tragic impression of the tale, and with the exception perhaps of the last-cited instance, do not create any distinctively supernatural atmosphere. Perhaps, as we have already remarked,* the trail of the ' horror-romanticism ' of the decade near the fag-end of which it was composed, runs through the poem.

The poems noticed above serve as examples to prove, if proof were needed, that Wordsworth does not exclude the supernatural element from his poetry of nature and human life. It is not regarded as alien from his purpose; on the other hand, he seeks its effect in order to add an edge of poignant sensibility to situations pregnant with impassioned human interest. At the same time, in bringing the supernatural into relation with human life, he does not go in for dramatic effect and shows indeed little sense of dramatic fitness or ordering,—a sense so exquisite in Coleridge, attuning the supernatural in his poetry to a higher power and finer significance. With the process of critical thinking by which, as we have observed in the previous part,† Coleridge arrived at the idea of dramatic probability, Wordsworth owned no contact, and what is more to the point, he shows a clear incapacity to handle mystery, and the supernatural strikes his imaginative sense not by its inherent mysterious quality, but mostly by its conceivable relation to human things. We shall presently observe how the sense

* See *supra*, pp. 155-156

† *Supra*, pp. 190 ff.

of mystery becomes a stepping stone as it were, over which Coleridge seems to cross from Wordsworth's realm of pure and simple humanity to his own world of weirdness and enchantment.

"*Peter Bell*" *and the* "*Ancient Mariner*"

Peter Bell, some parts of which were composed almost contemporaneously with the poems, containing a supernatural element, noticed above, emerged twenty-one years later from Wordsworth's hand, oddly shaped by an uncritical and novel theory, that of supernaturalism without supernatural machinery. The theory was completely disproved by the experiment, for by its application, as we shall observe, Wordsworth could reach not the interior of the supernatural world, but only its outskirts at best.

From Wordsworth's psychological interpretation and poetic treatment of folk-superstition which we have reviewed in the last part,* two principles seem to emerge which in combination give shape to the theoretical conception of *Peter Bell*. First, that the feeling for the supernatural is an instinctive or 'elementary' one having an independent existence in the human mind, and second, that this feeling excites the imagination to an intenser mode of working and creates thereby illusions of strange and striking phenomena outside the sphere of our standardised experience. "The poem of *Peter*

* *Supra*, pp. 169-177.

Bell, as the prologue will show,'' says Wordsworth in the dedicatory letter to Southey, '' was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that.....the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life.'' Hence the supernatural, to Wordsworth's mind, does not require to be sustained by ' the dragon's wing ' or ' the magic ring,' for :

> '' A potent wand doth Sorrow wield;
> What spell so strong as guilty Fear!
> Repentance is a tender Sprite;
> If aught on earth have heavenly might,
> 'Tis lodged within her silent tear.''
>
> (*Prologue*, ll. 146-150)

With this leading idea, the poet sets out to compose a poem which should command, as he perhaps imagines, the effect of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* even without its supernatural machinery.

A comparative study of the two poems gains importance from the fact that it lands us at a point of vantage, as it were, whence we can see the supernaturalism of Coleridge bifurcating from Wordsworthian naturalism or, rather what we have called, ' supra-naturalism.'

Between *Peter Bell* and the *Ancient Mariner* there is striking parallelism as well as contrast. The glamour of romance and the charm of the remote and unfamiliar in the basic conception of

Coleridge's poem are deliberately excluded by Wordsworth. The fascination of long perilous voyages over distant seas hangs round the Mariner's weather-worn figure, but the Potter's rovings are confined to the familiar places of England and Scotland. He is no human *revenant* out of 'ancient' days, but a common rustic of everyday world, sturdy of limb, dull in intelligence and devoid of any fine sensibility. The Mariner is a homeless spirit, 'passing like night from land to land,' but Wordsworth's rustic hero is firmly placed in the realities of his domestic life. The part played by the albatross in the *Ancient Mariner* is taken in *Peter Bell* by the obstinate beast that had probably its prototype in the woods of Alfoxden, and 'the hard see-saw of its horrible bray' was perhaps a familiar sound in Wordsworth's ears about the time the poem was commenced. Not only do the strange sea-bird and the familiar ass form an interesting contrast, but there is also a sheer contrast between the manner in which Coleridge idealises the albatross into something almost supernatural and spirit-like, and the way in which Peter Bell's ass is made to emphasise its beastly nature by its brayings and grinnings and unintelligent animal behaviour and even by its touching fidelity to the dead master.

But starting from this fundamental contrast, which resolves itself into that between realism and romance, in the respective conceptions of the two poems, we find a certain similarity in working out the so-called 'imaginative effects.' They arise out of uncanny experiences originating in a cruel and thoughtless act. The spirit of the slain albatross

seems to haunt the Mariner through the eerie voyage and the maltreated beast actually leads Peter Bell through his sensational experiences. The pathetic human interest in both poems emerges at the end after a process of painful expiation and tails off into a moral. The simple moral of the *Ancient Mariner* :

> " He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small; "

is paralleled by the more philosophic one in *Peter Bell* :

> " And now is Peter taught to feel
> That man's heart is a holy thing:
> And Nature, through a world of death,
> Breathes into him a second breath,
> More searching than the breath of spring."
>
> (ll. 1071-1075)

In both poems, the moral in its ethical significance is a protest against insensibility of the heart and plea for the cultivation of the spirit of universal love.

But the difference in treatment comes into clear relief when we consider, first, the nature of the hero's experiences, and secondly, the manner of organising and presenting them.

In the opening stanzas of Part III of *Peter Bell*, the poet invokes the ' potent spirits ' that ' play with soul and sense,' and cites, from personal recollection in the usual Wordsworthian vein, as

an instance of their power, the story of a man, who, poring over a book at night, suddenly found the lamps out and a ghostly word written in letters of light across the page. The ' spirits ' that produce such weird effects are, however, not the old, time-honoured supernatural agents, ' the palpable intruders from the other world,' though the poet, as he confesses, has even felt their presence ' in darkness and the stormy night,'—a statement which no discerning reader of Wordsworth's poetry will be inclined to doubt.* Moved by the trend of that philosophical thinking which leads Coleridge, as we have observed in the previous part, to obliterate the commonsense distinctions between the outer and the inner, Wordsworth calls them ' spirits of the Mind,' seeming thus to hark back to the stanza in the Prologue, quoted above, where the possible spell cast on a man by sorrow, guilty fear and repentance is referred to.

'What spell so strong as guilty Fear!'—asserts the poet,—and the whole story of *Peter Bell* is meant to be an elaborate illustration of it. All the grotesque and weird experiences of Peter Bell are directly referable to the workings of guilty fear. The echo from the rocks of the ass's 'long and clamorous bray,' which acted like a spell, so that

> " The moon uneasy looked and dimmer,
> The broad blue heavens appeared to glimmer,
> And the rocks staggered all around——"
>
> (ll. 483-485)

* See *supra*, p. 176 and footnote.

the towering rocks which appeared like temples, mosques, spires, abbey-windows and ivy-grown castles and which 'changed countenance and looked at Peter Bell ' ; the faintly rustling withered leaf, borne by the wind, which seemed to chase him ; the blood-stain upon the stone ; the sudden underground murmur ; and lastly, the apparitions of himself and the wronged woman ;—are all taken as instances, in the poet's own words, of the Spirits of the Mind

> " Upon the right of visual sense
> Usurping with a prevalence
> More terrible than magic spell."
> (ll. 918-920)

The last mentioned supernatural experience, by the way,—Peter seeing a spectral figure of his own self,—is of more than passing interest as foreshadowing some curious developments of the same idea in later literature. The passage attracted the special notice of Coleridge who in a note in *Anima Poetae* points to it as a matter of quite possible experience.* The 'wraiths' in Scotch stories were a current mediaeval superstition, which in Wordsworth's poem is transformed into a reflex of awakened conscience. In this psychological implication, the idea of a 'double' is developed in Stevenson's *Markheim* and is given a new turn towards the mysterious problem of dual personality in his more famous story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It shapes also the underlying

* P. 147.

conception of Oscar Wilde's novel, *Picture of Dorian Gray*.

But it will be observed that no real supernatural entity emerges out of Peter Bell's experiences, —only the imagination, working under the spell of guilty fear, makes the natural appear as supernatural to his eyes. Hence *Peter Bell* falls short of genuine supernatural effect and becomes only the special and concrete illustration of an idea. The power of the human mind to transform external objects to the expression of its own mood is one of the leading ideas of Wordsworth's poetry, appearing with reiterated emphasis and multiplied illustration in *The Prelude* and used also in various contexts and connections, even to justify the use of 'pathetic fallacy' by elegiac poets.* The nearest approach to the Coleridgean effect is made in the 'supra-natural' note and the study of illusions and hallucinations, which, however, are of the same order as those of all rustics, shepherds and mountaineers, but 'outward ministers of inward conscience.'† They are not invested with any supernatural aspect or occult significance at all in *Peter Bell*.

* "The poets, in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak,
In these their invocations, with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion."

——*Excursion*, I, ll. 475-481.

† See quotations from the *Excursion* at pp. 171-172 *supra*.

Again, in the manner of organising and presenting the experiences of the hero in *Peter Bell* and in *Ancient Mariner* respectively, Wordsworth is guided by the principle of ' poetic probability,' laid down in the dedicatory epistle to Southey and Coleridge by his principle of ' dramatic probability.' Wordsworth is enabled, under the limitations of *his* ' probability,' to proceed up to the point of ' supra-naturalism ' only, showing Nature in various weird and startling aspects, and the power which could have led him beyond this point was lacked by his mind, but possessed in full and abundant measure by Coleridge's. The latter had that creative sense of mystery which gives the power not only of abnormal or novel apprehension of Nature, but of access to a sort of twilight region or neutral zone between the subjective and the objective worlds, where things seen and things felt have no distinct and separate existences. The sense was rooted perhaps in his innate idealism,—his mystical perception of a symbolical character of visible phenomena.*

Situations, where the imaginative sensibility, excited by the spell of the atmosphere or the surroundings, is shown in its potent workings, are variously drawn by Wordsworth, from his own personal experiences of boyhood in Book I of *The Prelude* to the imagined experiences of Peter Bell. But Coleridge seems to have realised with the intuitive insight of an artist that the subjective element in such experiences can be made to react effectively on the appearance of the supernatural when it is

* See *supra*, pp. 182-184.

set forth as a sensible phenomenon,—to produce that baffling mystery which makes havoc of the distinction between the real and the unreal. It is exactly this mystery that Wordsworth stops short of, and phenomena which might partake of the character of the supernatural are represented in *Peter Bell* as plain unrealities conjured up by excited imagination.

In Coleridge's poem on the other hand, illusions seem to objectify themselves and supernatural existences to dissolve and melt into illusions. The experiences are not referred directly, as in Wordsworth's poem, to the workings of a distorted mind, yet seem somehow to be related intimately to them. Out of the strong dramatic stress which gathers as the tale unfolds itself, the supernatural incidents seem to be evolved almost as a matter of course. The excited mind of the Mariner, with which he perceives nature as charged with an unwonted intensity of life, is finely caught in his strange apprehensions of perfectly natural phenomena. There is demonic life in the storm-blast which like a gigantic vulture chases the drifting vessel; darkness comes like a giant at one stride; the upper air bursts into life and the stars whirl in a weird dance: the sun comes out, not in his familiar everyday aspect, but bright and red 'like God's own head,' or he settles above the mast goblin-like, 'bloody' and 'no bigger than the moon,' over the trance of the tropic sea. An excited and imaginatively heightened mood like that must have further course: it is capable of projecting itself further and shaping out of any strange object some palpa-

ble supernatural existence. The palpable supernatural existences are there in Coleridge's poem, but there is also the background of an over-excited supersensitised mentality. The incalculable interrelation between the two produces the fine inscrutability which invests the supernatural parts of the poem.

Coleridge

Coleridge's Poetic Personality

The few poems of Wordsworth, we have noticed above, represent only a by-way of imagination along which the poet tried, with somewhat uncertain steps and faltering gait, to reach the supernatural world of which he felt the fascination. But Wordsworth could touch only its outer boundaries at his utmost reach, while Coleridge dwelt habitually in the very heart and centre of it.

Coleridge's vivid interest, impregnated with psychology and metaphysics, in irrational and supernatural phenomena,—in illusions, hallucinations, magic and dreams,—which appears in his diary-notes in *Anima Poetae*,* in his course of lectures delivered in 1818,† in many a stray and curious

* See *Anima Poetae*, pp. 144 ff. (on Illusion), pp. 243 ff. (on Nightmare), pp. 277 ff. (on Superstition), etc.

† Lecture XII—"On tales of witches, apparitions, etc., as distinguished from the magic and magicians of Asiatic origin. The probable sources of the former, and of the belief in them in certain ages and classes of men. Criteria by which mistaken and exaggerated facts may be distinguished from absolute falsehood and imposture.

passage of his invaluable literary criticism,* and which was as vivid in old age as in youth as appears from Keats's sketch of the topics of Coleridge's forty-minutes' discourse, according to Prof. Garrod's time-calculation,† at a chance meeting with the junior poet, seems to have passed with a subtle influence from the intellectual into the artistic consciousness. Thus his pre-occupation with dream-phenomena must be related to his unique power of recapturing in the magic web of art the shifting, dissolving colours of dream-imagery. *Kubla Khan*, as the world knows, is a delicious opium-dream that happened to filter down miraculously into verse of unmatchable music and beauty. But it is not known how many such poems, peeping off and on through the ivory gate, remained uncaught in language by Coleridge. There is for instance a somewhat cryptic note in *Anima Poetae* which is of curious interest and significance, and it runs thus: "Poem. Ghost of a mountain—the forms seizing my body as I passed became realities. I, a ghost, till I had reconquered my substance."‡ The poem, if it were possible at all for Coleridge to compose it, would have been a decidedly unique specimen of

Lastly, the causes of the terror and interest which stories of ghosts and witches inspire, in early life at least, whether believed or not." (See Coleridge's *Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare*, Everyman's Library, p. 216 and pp. 301 ff.)

* See Ashe's *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare*, Introduction, pp. 17 ff.

† See Garrod's *Keats*, pp. 120-121——"As Keats indicates he was a slow goer, and their two miles' walk implies a talk of something like forty minutes."

‡ *Anima Poetae*, p. 60.

supernatural poetry, something perhaps bizarre and ultra-novel in that line.

Many of the notes collected in the same work point to his habit of brooding and pondering over phenomena of mental pathology and represent random attempts to track them through their sublimited forms and expressions in poetry.* We do not know exactly how far Coleridge was interested in the researches of Mesmer, but it is all too well known how he succeeded in transmuting into purely artistic conceptions the contemporary notions of 'ocular hypnosis' and 'animal magnetism.'† As Prof. Elton points out, the conception of 'possession,' domination of a mind by an idea discharged upon it from a superior will, which was

* A good instance is afforded by the extract from Collier's diary, quoted at p. 17 of the Introduction to Ashe's *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare*, containing Coleridge's observation on Scudamour's dream-experiences in the Cave of Care in the *Faerie Queene*. Another instance is Coleridge's attempt at a rational explanation of Scotch 'wraiths' and Peter Bell's apparition of his own self in the note in *Anima Poetae* on Illusion, p. 147.

† The point has been exhaustively dealt with by Prof. Lane Cooper in his paper on 'The Power of the Eye in Coleridge.' London and Bristol, during the seventeen-eighties, abounded in Mesmerists and Animal Magnetisers. That Coleridge in conceiving of the Ancient Mariner's personality associated with it the ideas of Mesmerism and animal magnetism appears from the following expurgated stanza occurring in the original version of the *Ancient Mariner*:

"'Listen, O listen, thou Wedding-guest!'
'Marinere, thou hast thy will:
'For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make
My body and soul to be still.'"

It was the inartistic intrusion of a doctrine in a work of pure imaginative art and as such was rightly removed.

introduced for the first time by Coleridge into poetic supernaturalism, might have come to him through tales of witchcraft or through such writers as Glanvill.* What is really worthy of note is that Coleridge's interest in this line is not a mere intellectual one, but a matter of deep-lying temperamental sympathy,—something that thrills exquisitely the nerves of poetic sensibility in him. Coleridge was thus fitted to be a poet of the supernatural *par excellence*,—one in whom the supernatural tradition of English poetry is touched with the alchemy of a poetic personality, at once tempting and baffling analysis.

One of the exquisite secrets of that personality is revealed by the series of note-books and diaries left by Coleridge, beginning with that intriguing document of bizarre and chaotic contents, the so-called 'Gutch Memorandum Book' of 1795. This secret lay in a habit of steady self-intercourse, a constant intercommunion between the poet's creative and critical self on one hand and the deeper recesses of his mind on the other where dim images and half-formed ideas lay gathering subjective colours and tones. Perhaps out of this habit of self-intercourse sprang the peculiar colour or complexion of the best of Coleridge's poetry—the *Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* in which the imagery is turned so strangely, produced as it seems not from mere nature-observation, but by magic touches of glamour added to reality. The interblending of the light of real vision and the

* See Elton's *Survey*, Vol. II, p. 111.

elfin glamour must have happened in some process of the poet's abnormal mental consciousness. It is thus,—in this process of self-intercourse,—that Coleridge achieves his best creative effects. What comes to him by way of mere literary tradition or suggestion from books or persons,—such as the supernatural in old legends, the haunted castle of romance, the title of Lewis's *Castle Spectre*, a sentence or two in *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, a dream of Cruikshank, Wordsworth's suggestion of 'spectral persecution' for the killing of an albatross,—strikes root immediately in his artistic consciousness, grows and flowers out with imaginative expansion, amplitude of meaning and ramifying associations.

Ancient Mariner

—*The Traditional Element*:

The tradition of supernatural legendary poetry enters undoubtedly into the motivation of the *Ancient Mariner*. In the minor poems of Coleridge, which now lie in the shadow of his incomparable masterpieces, what is most noteworthy and significant is his tentative attempt to take up some of the links in the neo-romantic tradition. The poet catches at the old Ossianic strain, strikes the exotic sentimental note and experiments also with the romantic legendary poetry. Most of these attempts, however, are overlaid and smothered by the crude imitativeness that lies like a heavy frost on nearly all his poetical productions before the flowering of

his original genius in the splendid summer of 1797 in the Quantocks, the splendour of which, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch remarks, has passed into the history of English literature.*

The working of Coleridge's mind towards romantic legends of a supernatural interest is betrayed by the short juvenile poem, *Anna and Harland*, written perhaps as early as in 1790, in which the poet turns in imagination for a moment to an old legendary theme,—the brother killing his sister's lover and the ghost of the woman wailing over the grave. The fascination of boy Coleridge for poetry of this kind is referred to in the lines :

> " The tales of other days before me glide,
> With eager thought I seize them as they pass."

This crude traditional supernatural, which touched his boyish imagination, seems afterwards to turn inwards and become the adventures of a ' soul in agony ' in the *Ancient Mariner*. In producing that wonderful flower of supernaturalism, which represents, as Walter Pater remarks, ' the only one really finished thing in a life of many beginnings,' the poet seems to have worked as Browning's musician did,—with the traditional strain he mixed up the tones of his own mind, framing out of three sounds, ' not a fourth sound, but a star.'† Unless

* See *Studies in Literature*, First Series (Coleridge), p. 251.

† *Ab' Vogler* :

> " And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
> That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound but a star."

we realise the merely traditional element in the *Ancient Mariner*, we shall only half understand its true magic,—the originality and transforming power of Coleridge's conception and treatment.

—The Dramatic Element:

The form adopted by Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner* was also the old traditional one, hackneyed by use before him by a host of ballad-imitators and legendary poets. Its thinness and meagreness would appear hardly capable of sustaining all the riches of imagery put into it by Coleridge. But by giving the traditional form an entirely new turn, he converts it into a plastic and complex artistic medium which outgrows completely the narrative simplicity of its models.

An intriguing note of the ballad manner, which links it up with its primitive communal origins, suggesting that the ballad was not merely sung but also to some extent acted, is the dramatic turn given off and on to the narrative. It is very happily instanced by the ' grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence ' in which the narrative is for the most part dramatically presented,—a ballad, by the way, which seems to have been one of Coleridge's favourites and is cited by him in the opening passage of the ode on *Dejection* for the striking image of ' the new moon with the old moon in her lap.' It seems that, with the obsolescence of its original accompaniments of folk-dance and action and in the age-long process of recasting and refashioning from the story-teller's or the literary artist's point of

view, the dramatic elements in original balladry got worn down to a mere dramatic beginning and an occasional inclusion of dialogue in the question-and-answer form. This outworn dramatic element of ballad poetry, which in the extant specimens is too often overlaid by the narrative interest, seems in Coleridge's poem to revive itself, with a complete 'sea-change' from the old mimetic motive to a formative artistic principle.

Thus the narrator does not merely tell us a wonderful tale of supernatural incidents that befell him in distant latitudes, but he himself seems to grow upon us as a character as the narrative proceeds, rising like a genie through the smoke. In the light of his narrated experiences, his figure seems to stand out gaunt and ghostly and weirdly impressive, thrown into relief by contrast with the puny figure of the Wedding Guest, so completely overshadowed by his masterful companion. The Mariner is not only limned out as a figure of arresting interest, but is also strongly individualised by physical traits which bear the strange impress of his mysterious experiences. Passing like night from land to land, he seems, like the old legendary King Cole,* to come out of the mists of other days into the gay trivial life of the present.

Perhaps in the descriptive word, 'ancient,' with its ambiguous suggestion of the Mariner's

* So the hero of Masefield's *King Cole* comes in touch for a brief spell, through his interest in a travelling circus involved in difficulties, with the petty and gay life of the present and then vanishes in the glimmering of moonlight.

age as well as of the long-past times out of which he seems to emerge ghost-like into the present, there is a light pressure on a key-note. Through the mariner's log given in the Argument of the poem, the strangeness and adventure of those other times come sweeping into the tale. The log indicates the historic route followed by old navigators from Magellan to Cook in their circumnavigations of discovery and adventure. Supernatural terrors lay along this route; terrible dangers lurked in its 'Frigida' and 'Perusta,' its arctic and tropic regions. They appear graphically in the phantasmagoric decorations of old cosmographies and mappemondes. The haunting fear of these uncharted seas, in which traditional terrors, both supernatural and real, were strangely mingled, lingered on through centuries, peeping out here and there even in the English travel-books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, until our modern era of scientific navigation.* This haunting fear of the sturdy, but superstitious circumnavigator of the Middle Ages is focussed on the poem through the mentality of the Ancient Mariner and his comrades.†

* See Lowes's *Road to Xanadu*, Chs. vii-ix.

† In regard, however, to the mediaevalism of the poem, the question of anachronistic time-indications in it, raised by a French critic cited by M. Charpentier in *Coleridge the Sublime Somnambulist* (trans. by Nugent, 1929), pp. 134-135, seems to be appropriate: "Whilst everything we can gather about the rustic wedding that is being celebrated in the wings, and the character of the musical instruments playing dance-tunes, might lead us to imagine ourselves in the eighteenth century, yet when the Ancient Mariner kills the albatross he does so with a cross-bow, a weapon seldom used later

Through the bewildered fear-haunted eyes of this Mariner, so dramatically conceived in relation to those other times when voyaging had the romance of weird possibilities, we are made to see the vast shiftings from zone to zone of sea-scapes and sky-scapes. Through his obsessed terror-stricken consciousness, we are made to feel the mysterious forces, working first for revenge through daemonic agency and then for redemption through angelic. The vividness and concreteness of all the imagery of the poem is produced from the 'sea-dog's' anxious, minute and vigilant watch over all changes in the sea and sky. The doubling of Cape Horn is indicated by the shift of the sun's position from left to right; at the equator the sun looks small at noon right above the mast; in the arctic zone, the ice sends a dismal sheen through the snowy clefts or comes floating, 'mast-high,' 'green as emerald'; the creatures of the tropic sea flash in its phosphorescence; no twilight divides at the tropics the dipping of the sun's rim and the rushing out of the stars; the horned moon climbs ominously, as the superstitious seaman views it, 'with a star within the nether tip.' These phenomena are noted with a sailor's eye, and even the nostalgic visions of Nature's caressing beauty at home that must come off and on to navigators struggling with wild seas and warring elements introduce the

than the sixteenth century. And again, if at the entrance to the harbour stands a light-house, which would therefore seem to suggest the time of the first great voyages of discovery, how does it then come to be haunted by a hermit, the same as those who used to build their little oratories at the foot of some oak tree in Celtic forests?"

'hidden brook' and the 'sleeping wood,' the 'ivy-tod heavy with snow,' the 'dropping' skylark and the 'sweet jargoning' of little birds.

In the various tone-modulations of the descriptive passages, there is also dramatic assimilation of the reverberations of the Mariner's shifting moods. The noises of the cracking of ice round the doomed vessel strike his astounded consciousness in a peculiar way,—with confused far-off intimation of savage Nature, tense-nerved and ferocious, waiting to leap upon its prey :

> " It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound ! "
>
> (Part I, st. 15)

The remorseful self-reproaching agony of his mind overhears multiplied reminders of his crime in the prolonged and repeated hisses made by the flight of the souls of the dead crew :

> " And every soul, it passed me by,
> Like the whizz of my cross-bow ! "
>
> (Part III, st. 17)

The peace and calm of his mind, as he drifts over the harbour-bar, seems to rest outwardly upon the scene that greets him from a distance :

> " The moonlight steeped in silentness,
> The steady weather-cock."
>
> (Part VI, st. 17)

The fitness of such descriptions is a dramatic fitness, achieved by a carefully studied art quite alien from the ballad manner. The poem is in fact conceived throughout in this subtly dramatic fashion, throwing its imagery, its incidents and episodes, and even, as we shall see later, its much disputed moral into relation with the central character, the Mariner himself. Perhaps in the very turn of the language and phraseology towards the quaint picturesqueness of old travel-tales, told by sailors themselves, there is a certain dramatic appropriateness.*

The effect of 'other times' and their strange adventures and modes of being is reinforced by the accompaniment of a real-life incident. Through the magnifying mists of the weird tragic tale, slight flitting glimpses of familiar life with its petty gaieties and joys are let in. The wedding that goes on in the distance does not exactly form a background, for the sights and sounds come only fitfully, rarely,—only to remind us of the strange remoteness from real life of the Mariner's experiences. It does not evoke a sense of contrast between the everyday human event and the supernatural happenings, for the wedding scene is nowhere brought into any such direct and palpable contrast. The effect aimed at is really a subtler one,—as though we should be listening to a piece of weird music, suggesting agony and distorting pain, and into its sombre cadences should come

* See the parallelisms cited from Frederick Martens, Captain James, Harris and others in Lowes's *Road to Xanadu*, pp. 140 ff.

floating off and on the tinklings of merry bells pealing somewhere afar. They are not worked into the harmony of the music, but supply a fitful accompaniment contributing to the total effect. It is possible that the wedding was suggested to Coleridge's mind by the stock-incident of the ghost appearing at a marriage-feast. But between Coleridge's artistic device and the motive of crude contrast in poems like Scott's *Frederick and Alice* and Lewis's *Alonzo and Imogene*, the difference is almost beyond all measure.

—*The Moral Element*:

Lastly, the controversial moral of the poem is decidedly an innovation in poetry of the supernatural kind and, in view of the controversy it has evoked, it becomes necessary to examine the question of its artistic propriety and fitness.

The moral has been attacked on the grounds of both intrinsic irrelevancy and relative inadequacy and feebleness. When Coleridge, in his somewhat curt and off-hand reply to Mrs. Barbauld's remark, denied the propriety of the moral of the *Ancient Mariner*, comparing the poem with a tale of the *Arabian Nights*,* he betrayed a lack of appreciation

* "But as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much: and that the only, or the chief fault, if I may say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Night's tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up and says he must *kill* the aforesaid merchant, because one of the shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son."—*Table Talk* May 31, 1830. (Ashe's *Table Talk and Omniana*, p. 87).

of one of the distinguishing features of his own conception of supernaturalism in poetry, *viz.*, its human interest in dealing with the supernatural. It is worth while probing into Coleridge's argument on the point.

It is obvious that in a supernatural tale there can be no question of the linking together of cause and effect or the working out of a principle of action. The genie does not kill the merchant, *because* one of his cast-off shells put out the eye of the genie's son, nor do the supernatural tortures afflict the Mariner, *because* he thoughtlessly killed the albatross. A supernatural happening is *ex hypothesi* a negation of the natural sequence of cause and effect. Where, however, the human mind under the influence of the supernatural is represented and the truth of emotions evoked by it imaginatively studied, as the purpose of Coleridge himself was, the moral becomes relevant in the same way as the emotions themselves. The mind passing out of the supernatural spell would naturally reach out towards a resting place in some recognizable truth of human life or principle of human action. In this psychological significance, the logical adequacy or propriety of the moral becomes a matter of no moment. In fact, there is the same ' dramatic truth ' in the moral as there is in all the various emotions of horror, remorse, pity, joy, etc., through which the Mariner's mind is led.

The fallacy which lurks in condemning the moral of the poem as inadequate or absurd, being a gross violation of all sense of proportion between the crime and the punishment, is a twofold one.

First, it amounts to applying to the Mariner's act a standard of judgment which the poet puts out of court *ab initio*, as we have already seen,* by the very vagueness and remoteness of the venue. To the relative spirit of the modern age, the moral complexion of an act is apt to vary even with degrees of latitude and longitude. To kill a bird in a populated city is an act obviously of a different moral complexion from killing it where its life is valued not in relation to human life, but to the wider and more abiding life of Nature. The idea seems to be implicit in the moral itself. It is a plea for the elevation of our point of view from the narrow man-made code of justice to the wider divine dispensation in which all things great and small have an equal value in God's eyes. We could never be sure that the life of the albatross was not more valuable than the lives of the ship's entire crew in the divine scheme of things. Secondly, the fallacy amounts to ignoring the inscrutable element in all human affairs, that element which makes itself manifest in the familiar tragedy of awful endings to trivial and seemingly slight beginnings. Pan's Pipes, as says Stevenson in one of his charming essays,† must mix their capricious outlandish strain with the set music of our lives. An act may be charged with all the force of destiny and go on haunting our life with incalculable influences that no theory of cause and effect can adequately explain.

In fact, the whole effect of the supernatural in life as in literature springs from the abiding

* See *supra*, p. 204.

† See 'Pan's Pipes' in *Virginibus Puerisque*.

sense in the human mind,—the 'fate-sense' as we may call it,—that the sequence between an act and its possible effects is always something unknown and incalculable. The yearning for this ever-baffling mystery, this 'x'-factor of human life, is thus put by Housman in bare terms of arithmetic :

" To think that two and two are four
And neither five nor three,
The heart of man has long been sore
And long 'tis like to be."

The whole aesthetic justification for supernaturalism in literature lies in this longing for escape out of a false logic of life towards the realisation of the abiding element of mystery in human things.

—Organic Unity and Plausibility of the Poem :

Wordsworth's note on the *Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* remains a monumental example of the failure to comprehend the magic of creative art by the method of dissective criticism practised so vigorously from Johnson to Jeffrey. We can see how Wordsworth's criticism of the *Ancient Mariner* is false almost at every point. The 'principal person' strikes him as having no 'distinct character,' and Wordsworth must have had in mind such types of character as he him-

self sketched in *Michael*, *Simon Lee*, *The Waggoner* and other poems for his special poetic purpose. But characterisation of this type was hardly Coleridge's cue. In remarking, however, that the Mariner does not 'partake of the supernatural' though long 'under the control of supernatural impression,' Wordsworth shows curious insensibility to the Mariner's 'glittering eye,' 'strange power of speech,' 'fitful agony' and the habit of roving from land to land. Wordsworth does not seem also to understand at all the action of the poem, for when he remarks that the Mariner 'does not act himself, but is continually acted upon,' he ignores the character of the tale which shows the play on a human victim of free and inexorable supernatural forces, and he rules out the very idea of supernatural occurrence in holding that 'the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other.' As regards the overlaboured accumulation of imagery, it is a singular opinion which perhaps few readers of the poem will share with Wordsworth. The poem in fact is so vitally organic that to dissect is to murder it: it can be judged only with reference to the total impression and effect.

'The plausibility, the perfect adaptation to reason and the general aspect of life,' that Walter Pater and other critics speak of with reference to the *Ancient Mariner*, is nothing but the final compelling impression. The secret of this plausibility undoubtedly lies in the dramatic drift and stress of the poem. Charles Lamb, as he confided to Wordsworth, disliking all the 'miraculous part of

it,' was ' dragged along like Tom Piper's magic whistle ' by ' the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery.'* It is an experience that comes to all readers of the poem, and it is the ' feelings ' that give the key to what is not a plain tale of miraculous happenings, but a dramatic psycho-supernatural story.

As it slowly unfolds itself, we are wholly rapt away into the mind of the Mariner, and not for a moment does the poet take us out of it so long as we are involved in and identified with the imaginative experience. In the complete harmony of that experience there is no breach through which the note of rational judgment may insinuate itself. Given the Ancient Mariner and the associations that cling round him of old-time voyaging with its attendant weird possibilities, the rest would follow naturally along the line of imagination laid down by the poet. The ' dramatic probability ' is complete and ' the suspension of disbelief ' comes in consequence.

All shocks and jars that may start the activity of independent judgment are absorbed in the tale. We see and feel only through the Mariner's eyes and mind, and we can pronounce the story to be improbable only when we have stepped out of its estranging, isolating spell. The tale is foreshadowed in the awful change of expression, not described but left to the imagination, that comes upon the

* See *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by Lucas, Vol. VI, p. 209.

Mariner's face and startles the wedding guest into the exclamation :

> " God save thee, ancient mariner!
> From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
> Why look'st thou so? "
>
> (Part I, st. 20)

With this ominous sign, we step into the Mariner's world. But the supernatural incidents do not come all at once into the narrative. The sea-scape changes, the ship is becalmed, and the face of Nature gradually turns to a livid expression. The silence of the sea becomes strange and startling ; the bloody sun stands above the mast ' no bigger than the moon ' ; the deep seems to rot ; the death-fires dance at night ; the water like a witch's oils burns green and blue and white ; and, through the torture of drought and silence, come ominous dreams, throwing the crew into a state of fearful apprehension. So time like a slow-racking torture goes on, and seems to project the series of super-natural horrors, beginning with the appearance of the spectre-bark with its pair of spectral occupants, Death and Life-in-Death.

These two supernatural figures are touched with symbolism bearing on the form of punishment that the Mariner was destined to undergo. They are agents of destiny. Their outward aspect, deve-loped out of the dream of Coleridge's friend ' who fancied he saw a skeleton-ship with figures in it,' is somewhat conventionally conceived and is really in line with the skeletal monstrosities of the ' horror-romantic school.' But Coleridge, peeling off from

them afterwards ' the mouldy damps and charnel crust,' yet retaining the suggestion of skeletons, makes them such nameless horrors, indistinct and incomprehensible, as one might see under pressure of a night-mare. The cryptic description of Death's mate in the lines :

" The Night-Mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold."

(Part III, st. 11)

conveys no distinct image or idea, but leaves the mind filled with vague suggestions of something oppressive, terrible and awful.

The threefold whistling of the spectre is the signal for the execution of the punishment,—a universal Life-in-Death through which the victim is to be led. It throws all Nature into one vast, convulsive swoon. At first a spasm of hurried and excited movement seems to seize upon Nature :

" The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out :
At one stride comes the dark; "

(Part III, st. 13)

and then it suddenly settles down to a stunned, still and ghastly condition :

" The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip."

(Part III, st. 14)

The physical reactions of swooning,—spasmodic excitement followed by breathless stillness,—are suggested by the description as well as by the rhythm. Yet how accurately true at the same time is the description to the actual falling of night on a tropic sea! We are thus launched on the train of supernatural incidents with a heavy boding sense of Fate, which overwhelms the Mariner, throws all Nature into a convulsive swoon, and outwardly focuses itself in the ominous sign of the horned moon with the star within the nether tip.

In the midst of the vast solitude of sea and sky, sudden death falls on the crew like a fatal blow from nowhere. And from this point onwards, we are 'in medias res' of the action of supernatural forces, until they ease off within sight of familiar land,—and the whole is afterwards made to appear in the final impression, by a sleight of art already noticed,* by recalling simple humanity, like a protracted evil dream of agony and pain.

Christabel

—*the Humanity of its Theme*:

While the *Ancient Mariner* is a poem, perfectly planned and executed, finished and complete in every respect, *Christabel* in its fragmentary condition seems to hold a perpetual challenge to speculation like the armless statue of Venus de Milo. Even

* See *supra*, pp. 211-212.

before the poem had appeared in print, a continuation of it was attempted by Anna Verdill Niven in the pages of the *European Magazine* for April, 1815, ' written as a sequel,' as the authoress declared, ' to a beautiful legend of a fair lady and her father, deceived by a witch in the guise of a noble knight's daughter.'* The manner of Coleridge is artfully imitated and Lady Geraldine stands forth as the heroine of the story. She is the Witch of the Lake escaped for a while from Merlin's spell. " The Magician raises the spirit of Sir Leoline's dead wife and from her learns that Geraldine's power will pass away at the moment of the espousal of Christabel and her own true knight."† Geraldine is discomfited, her spells are exhausted, and falling again under Merlin's influence, she is retransformed into the Witch of the Lake. The question inevitably arises—Did Coleridge intend to develop the story on this line and was the main interest of the poem to arise from the supernatural machinations of Lady Geraldine?

Any answer to such a question must necessarily be of a speculative character. But one may be permitted to hazard a suggestion that the real heroine of the poem does not appear in the extant fragments, though her future appearance on the scene is clearly foreshadowed. It is the shade of Christabel's dead mother, watching over the child

* See Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, Vol. XXVIII (Article on *Anna Jane Verdill Niven, the Authoress of 'Christabell,' the sequel to Coleridge's Christabell*, by William E. A. Axon).

† *Ibid*, p. 78.

and rescuing her from supernatural harms. From the very beginning her existence is suggested, slightly at first and then with increasing clearness. The old mastiff-bitch is aware of it through the uncanny sense of the animal kind: 'some say, she sees my lady's shroud.' The mother's shade hovers anxiously and uneasily over Christabel as Christabel calls her to mind and wishes her near, and Geraldine detects the spectral presence with her second sight. The clue to the theme of the poem seems to be given in the dark words of Geraldine, driving the mother's spectre away with her sinister spell:

> "Off, wandering mother, peak and pine!
> I have power to bid thee flee."
>
> (ll. 205-206)

and also:

> "Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—
> Though thou her guardian spirit be,
> Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me."
>
> (ll. 211-213)

The interest of the poem, it thus appears, was to centre upon a conflict between the disembodied love of a dead mother and the wicked spell of a witch-like woman, in which no doubt love was destined to win, for, as the poet reassures us, "the blue sky bends over all." It was thus to be the story of a supernatural entanglement and its resolution through the power of love. So much as we have of the five parts, in which Coleridge proposed

to complete the poem, shows only the beginning of the entanglement and the resolution, which was bound to be full of human and dramatic interest, was to follow.

It is not possible to guess how the poet would have brought about the resolution. But in that part of the story, the dominant influence would undoubtedly have been that of the spirit of Christabel's mother. The theory is corroborated by the Conclusion to Part I which is conceived as a quaint poetic commentary on the whole story. The significance of the Conclusion is unmistakable. Lady Geraldine tries to steal, with a secret sinister purpose, into the place of Christabel's mother :

> " And lo! the worker of these harms,
> That holds the maiden in her arms,
> Seems to slumber still and mild,
> As a mother with her child."
>
> (ll. 298-301)

And her wicked simulation of motherliness challenges to conflict the love of the true mother's spirit, and Christabel's dreams are coloured by the coming conflict. Fearful dreams of the hideous sign she has witnessed alternate with comforting and reassuring ones :

> " With open eyes (ah, woe is me!)
> Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
> Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
> Dreaming that alone, which is—
> O sorrow and shame! "
>
> (ll. 292-296)

and again :

" Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
.....
.....
.....
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet,
.....
What if she knew her mother near? "
(ll. 319-328)

The dreams, which are so significant of the intended theme of the poem, are recalled by her on the morrow in Sir Leoline's presence.

In the beginning of the Second Part, which was written three years after the first, the existence of the spirit of the dead lady, enveloping the life of the whole castle with its influence, is emphasised. The knell at her death is repeated every morning : the life of the castle is, as it were, a continuation of her death :

" Each matin bell, the Baron saith,
Knells us back to a world of Death."
(ll. 332-333)

And out of the world of Death was to come the real heroine of the poem—not out of the haunted forest behind the castle.

If this conflict between two rival supernatural forces was really intended as the theme of the poem, the line of continuation by Verdill Niven was decidedly wrong, for the story was meant to be more human and ' human-hearted ' than a simply marvellous tale of ' the machinations of a witch in

the guise of a noble knight's daughter.' It is not in the manner of Coleridge to exhibit the supernatural for its marvel alone, merely for the thrill and wonder of it, and the type of criticism that would fain interpret *Christabel* as pure supernatural thrill and regret the dissolving of the witchery in the daylight of the Second Part, only takes advantage of fragmentary condition of the poem and probably strays away from the intended drift of the story. Perhaps in this poem also the poet was aiming at 'the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of emotions' evoked by supernatural situations and the investing of 'the shadows of imagination' with 'a human interest and a semblance of truth.' As the poem stands, a fabric of dovetailed fragments, its supernaturalism achieves only the preliminary sketch of a mysterious character and the raising of the magical atmosphere in which it opens.

Lady Geraldine stands in line with those mysterious figures appearing in mediaeval legends and romances that hide some demoniac personality in human form. But it is difficult to refer Geraldine to any particular type. She is characterised neither by the familiar grossness of a witch nor by the strange, other-worldly elusiveness of an elf-woman, typified by the one that appeared to the demented knight in Coleridge's ballad of *Love* :

> "There came and looked him in the face
> An angel beautiful and bright;
> And that he knew it was a Fiend,
> This miserable knight!"

She recalls rather the lamias and serpent-women, though the serpent-part in her case, in stead of being physical, has become a serpentine something in her constitution. This serpentine something in her is not only indicated symbolically by Bracy's ominous dream, but manifests itself even outwardly in the weird fitful glances of her uncanny eyes :

" A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy;
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,
And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,
At Christabel she looked askance!—
One moment—and the sight was fled! "

(ll. 583-588)

As she lay clasping Christabel in her bosom at night, was she trying to impart to her by a kind of animal magnetism something of her own serpentine nature? For it seems significant that in the presence of Sir Leoline, the hypnotic influence of Geraldine falls twice upon her and on each occasion, bound by the spell on her utterance, she can give forth only a ' hissing sound ' :

" Again she saw that bosom old,
Again she felt that bosom cold,
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:
Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,
And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid
With eyes upraised, as one that prayed."

(ll. 457-462)

Again :

" At Christabel she looked askance!—
One moment—and the sight was fled!
But Christabel in dizzy trance,
Stumbling on the unsteady ground,
Shuddered along, with a hissing sound;"
(ll. 587-591)

Yet the conception of a serpent-woman is crossed by the unexplained mystery of the ' mark of shame and seal of sorrow ' on her person. It seems to suggest some sort of curse resting upon her life, distorting her out of normal nature and compelling her to be what she is. If so, a novel ramification of the story would suggest itself showing her as a being of a different nature and order,—a human creature with mysterious antecedents and history behind her of which not the slightest hint is given. Her magic is of a subtler kind than that wrought by midnight rites or made up from herbs gathered by moonlight. It flows from her eye, effuses from her whole body, and is perceived by the instinctive animal sense of the mastiff at once. The poet in the conception of her personality draws evidently upon the conceptions of Mesmerism and leads the way for the subsequent treatment in fiction and poetry of similar conceptions based on the magnetic or hypnotic power of the eye or the body.

—the Atmosphere in Part I :

This woman of inexplicable mystery and subtle magic suddenly issues out of an atmosphere and a

background over which also broods heavily the spirit of magic and mystery. We have already remarked on the suggestive power of the atmosphere created at the beginning of the poem.* The troubled noises of birds and animals breaking the dead silence of midnight, mixed with the jarring sounds of a crazy clock, the chilly sensation of night which becomes almost creepy because of the trouble of muffled moonlight, the queer appearance of the moon itself, the gloomy forest background of the castle and the dream-troubled maiden kneeling alone under the oak,—all these suggestions of trouble and uneasiness, followed by an uncertain moan and the maid's trepidation emphasised by the responsive cry of 'Jesu Maria, shield her well!' have a predisposing effect, and the reader's mind, when it has become intimate with the scene, expects the supernatural fully with what Coleridge calls 'poetic faith.'

In the very descriptive manner, there is a magical and incantatory undertone. Little things suddenly seem to become prodigiously significant like trifles held up and exhibited by a magician. The owls awaken the crowing cock, but there is an unwonted note in its crowing :

> "And hark, again: the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew."
>
> (ll. 4-5)

A chilly night, a thin grey cloud, and a full moon behind it, looking quite naturally small and dull

* See *supra*, p. 206.

behind the transparent cloud-screen, are set forth in such a way as though there were something unusual about each of the phenomena :

" Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly but not dark."

By simply combining the two ideas and then severing them, the poet achieves here an effect like that of a magician making two passes with his hand.

" The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky."
(ll. 16-17)

Here also there is really nothing unusual, but the force of the disjunctive word is to suggest an unusual phenomenon.

" The moon is behind, and at the full:
And yet she looks both small and dull."
(ll. 18-19)

—As if there were some spell cast on the moon, though the appearance is in point of fact perfectly natural. And the whole piece of magical description is wound up with words that have the reiterative suggestion of the utterance of a spell by a magician, with carefully modulated accents and stresses :

" The night is chill, the cloud is gray:
'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the spring comes slowly up this way."
(ll. 20-23)

The trick of carrying on the description and the narrative through questions and answers, *e.g.*,

(*a*) Is the night chilly and dark? (l. 14)
(*b*) What makes her in the wood so late,
A furlong from the castle-gate? (ll. 15-26)
(*c*) Is it the wind that moaneth bleak? (l. 44)
(*d*) What sees she there? (l. 57)
(*e*) And what can ail the mastiff-bitch? (l. 149)
(*f*) Why stares she with unsettled eye? (l. 208)

—not only gives just that suggestion of something unusual or uncanny, calculated to put the reader's mind from point to point into a state of apprehension or expectancy, but also gives the narrative a certain incantatory turn. It is significant that in the ' daylight witchery ' of the Second Part, the manner is changed and it becomes more continuously narrative, and the questions where they occur have a different value and significance, a rhetorical one, *e.g.*,

" Why waxeth Sir Leoline so pale,
Murmuring o'er the name again,
Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine? "
(ll. 405-407)

Touches of the weird and the fantastic also are applied in order to alter to a somewhat extraordinary complexion the appearance of Nature. The effects of winter on the forest are represented so queerly and detachedly, with such light and casual strokes, that the mental impression produced settles not on the stripping process of winter, but on the odd

tricks that Nature like a fantastic imp seems to have played with the trees and boughs :

" And nought was green upon the oak
But moss and rarest mistletoe."
(ll. 33-34)

And :

" The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up to the sky."
(ll. 49-52)

It is the acme of the art of pressing realism into the service of fantasy, making realistic details of description not picturesquely telling so much, as suggestive of the queerness, grotesqueness and extraordinariness of the scene, all gathering into a total impression of something haunting, something enchanted, around us.

When we awake, as we must, out of the bewitching spell that the poet casts upon us in the First Part, we take stock of the impression left on the mind and find it a curiously detached and illusory one. Midnight, a castle with a haunted forest behind, a dream-awakened maid kneeling under an oak,—all this might form the prelude to something strange about to happen. Then a wonder in the person of a supremely beautiful lady emerges out of the wood ; the maid meets her and a brief conversation ensues ; they both enter the castle in silence ; retire and sleep together ; but the

sense of something uncanny about the bed-mate prevents the maiden's sleep and, scrutinising her person, she discovers a mystery, whereat the lady asserts her real nature and casts a spell on her utterance. The whole is remote and fantastic, like a dim shadow-play, unrelated to time or place. Yet there are a few fragile threads that seem to hold it on to real life. But they are frail and thin as gossamer. We are told that the mistress of the castle is dead, that ruffianism and rape occur in the lawless land, and that Sir Leoline is a strong feudal lord at the head of a 'stout chivalry.' These gossamer threads, however, swell to the size of ropes in the Second Part and are adapted no more to work of such delicate artistry as the First Part of the poem is.

—*the Change in Part II*:

The castle has become a real feudal stronghold like one in Scott's romantic narratives and relations of time and space have been established. Yet the impression which the castle leaves on the imagination is markedly different. The picture is indeed complete with all the feudal accessories and complements, but the ominous dream of Bracy, a typical minstrel and bard, which leads him to take a vow that, 'with music strong and saintly song,' he would

> "Wander through the forest bare,
> Lest aught unholy loiter there."
>
> (ll. 562-563)

suggests, apart from its symbolical bearing on the relationship between Christabel and Geraldine, a mysterious menace to the life of the castle which may arise any moment from the gloomy forest behind. A heavy atmosphere of death and ghastliness rests upon the castle. Its matin bell sounds each morning a warning knell :

> " Which not a soul can choose but hear
> From Bartha Head to Wyndermere; "
> (ll. 343-344)

and the dolorous sounds wake the three sinful sextons' ghosts :

> " Who all give back, one after t'other,
> The death-note to their living brother;"
> (ll. 354-355)

—the notes being prolonged by a mocking merry peal, rung by the devil, that comes floating from Borodale. When daylight falls upon the castle, we can see it looming up like any feudal keep, Branksome Tower or Norham's castle, yet with a certain difference. Its ghastly associations overshadow completely the feudal or mediaeval impression.

It is undeniable that the narrative takes a fresh turn in Part II and comes out of the peculiar atmosphere of the preceding part. The turn is towards energetic, chivalrous action round which the gossamer web of fantasy can no longer be hung. In spite of Coleridge's vigorous claim for originality in the Preface, first prefixed to the 1816 edition of

Christabel, one cannot help suspecting that the influence of Scottish mediaevalism had something to do in diverting the spirit of the poem from the heavy brooding mystery of the first part to the chivalry of action of the second. It is really the visions and trances of Christabel in the Second Part that lie open to the famous charge of ' witchery by daylight ' which was brought against the poem by the *Contemporary Review*.

But the change of atmosphere can surely be defended as artistically necessary and even inevitable from the point of view of literary workmanship. *Christabel* is not a poem of a single situation, but a gradually unfolding story. When Coleridge intended to extend it with ' new characters and a greater number of incidents,' the passing of time must have been calculated by him to enter into it as an indispensable factor. It cannot be midnight always : the hours must wear on to daylight and the thrills and sensations of midnight must yield to a clearer definition of their causes and effects. In the light of day, they present themselves with the faintness or tenuity of dreams or become definite in relation to waking life and real surroundings.

With regard to Lady Geraldine who was wrapped up in her own inscrutable mystery at night, the second alternative takes place. She is not brought into the story merely floating like thistledown from the forest, but has to settle down and participate in the action. Hence out of the suffused moonlight of the first part, she is introduced into the strong daylight of the second, and becomes at once a definite personality. The first

act of her insidious campaign is to bring about an estrangement between the short-tempered father and the innocent child over a point of the code of chivalry. But though the veil of mystery is withdrawn from her, the substantial mystery of her personality remains.

The Supernatural in the A. M. and in Ch.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* from the point of view of total artistic effect, for what the final impression of the latter poem would have been is altogether unknown. As it stands in its fragmentary condition, it attains to no unity of impression, and there is an evident breach of emotional tension or continuity of spirit between the two parts. But a comparison and contrast between the supernaturalism of the *Ancient Mariner* and that of *Christabel* obviously suggests itself.

The motive in both poems has the inward psychological direction : it is projected into the modes of feeling and thinking of the victims of the supernatural. But the supernatural entities in the two poems belong to different orders.

In the *Ancient Mariner*, there is a harking back to the traditional forms and conceptions of supernaturalism,—spectres, daemon-voices, invisible water-sprites, seraphs in shapes of flame, although they are presented without clear tone or outline and in a manner which by its studied attenuation and indefiniteness suggests dreams, illusions and hallucina-

tions rather than objective existences. They are more felt in their manifestations of power than visualised in their appearances. The spectral players of dice are vague horrors; the voices of the daemons are heard in the Mariner's 'soul,' the water-sprite of the polar sea is an object of dream and conjecture. They become thus not definite agents of action, but mysterious potencies that seize hold of both body and soul and play at will with life and death. Yet they impinge on the outer world. But in *Christabel* the supernatural entities work wholly in the inner: they belong to the sphere of the occult, interest in which dates back in romantic literature to Schiller's unfinished romance of the 'Ghost-seer,' —the hypnosis of the eye, the magnetism of the body, the spell framed not in words, but issuing out of the touch of the bosom. Some of them are casually suggested in the *Ancient Mariner* like the 'glittering eye,' the compelling will-power, the 'strange power of speech' and the fitful inexplicable malady of the Mariner. While such things are incidental in the poem, merely suggestive and significant, they are of the very stuff of which the supernaturalism of *Christabel* is wrought.

It is not only in the nature of the supernatural elements, but also in the manner of their presentation, that the two poems show a marked difference. These elements seem to come to view in indistinct intermittent flashes in the *Ancient Mariner*, yet with effects real and visible on Nature as well as on the human victims. But in *Christabel*, they are diffusive and intangible like a pervasive smell or haunting presence, at any rate in the First Part.

—something that does not come out to assail and strike the senses, but can be felt only by an aesthetic self-surrender to its influence. The sensationalism that characterises Lewis and his school is here attuned to the finest possible scale. The art with which the ghostly existence of the dead mistress of the castle is introduced at the beginning is characteristic :

' Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.' (l. 13)

To apply to the line the vague and wide term, 'suggestive,' seems hardly sufficient. What we have here is really a subtle play on several keys of associated ideas. Each word is a light pressure evoking subtle tones of thought and feeling. The presence of the ghost is made so faint, so aerially impalpable, that it can be conjectured only through the instinctive behaviour of a bitch, and we may well wonder how distant the mental sensation caused by raising such a conjectural spectre must needs be from the downright sensationalism of the visual representation of a ghost. The tonic quality of the language agrees well with this fine and delicate presentation of the supernatural. It is a muffled tone, never becoming loud in the first part at any rate, with an occasional stammering hesitation that seems, as it delivers the words, to hang listening to what has been said and to vibrate always with an undertone of latent meaning.

Kubla Khan and Dream-Poetry

In *Kubla Khan*, the supernatural appears in a wholly different fashion and the poem does not stand

in line with the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, but anticipates, as we shall see later, the different supernaturalism of later romantic poets like Keats and Shelley.

For here supernaturalism is not a product of deliberate art, but a property of the inner life of imagination, lying deep at the roots of lyrical and subjective expression. The urge of the supernatural is felt in the poem as a hidden power, as latent heat throughout, coming to the surface and showing palpably, however, only in a few ' fast, thick pants,' as in the sudden floating up of an image of unearthly passion and in the startling outburst of ' ancestral voices prophesying war.' All the forms of romantic beauty in the poem have a strange supernatural complexion which pales off to a mere touch of fantasy in ' the sunny domes and caves of ice,' combining irreconcilable charms of Nature, and deepens to a hectic romantic colour in the casually introduced image of ' woman wailing for her demon-lover.'

The poem belongs to what Prof. Elton happily describes as ' the dream-territory of art,'* a discovery of the romantic poets, specially of Coleridge, although it was De Quincey, the artist of poetic prose, who became the undisputed sovereign in this territory. Revolting from the dominion of Reason, the pioneer minds of the romantic era were constantly straying into widely scattered realms of unreason, and dream-phenomena formed a world full of subtle attractions. It was the world of sensa-

* *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), Vol. II, p. 324.

tions and sensibilities. *Kubla Khan* and the *Pains of Sleep*, as Coleridge himself has told us, represent and embody two contrasted aspects of dream, induced unhealthily in his case by opium-fumes,—of delicious pleasure and of morbid pain,—and in Crabbe's *World of Dreams* we may see both the painful and the pleasurable aspects of dream caught in a broader web of strangely shifting fantastic imagery.

Between the capriciousness of dream-phenomena and the inconsequence of supernatural happenings, both mediaeval and modern poets have perceived a tempting though spurious analogy. Yet dreams are true as mental experience, while supernatural occurrences are to all rational minds but imaginary and fictitious. Hence, perhaps, the mediaeval allegorist sought to give a sort of subjective truth and reality to the supernatural story by setting it in the framework of a dream. But the futility of the conventional dream-motive for the purpose of imparting reality to the supernatural is obvious enough. The romantic poet, with a finer sense of aesthetic values, sought to achieve the same end not by a formal setting, but by transferring the characteristic qualities of dream-phenomena to the supernatural incidents and imagery.

When Coleridge, disgusted by the obtuseness of aesthetic appreciation in his readers, an immortal sample of which remains in Mrs. Barbauld's demand for a moral of the *Ancient Mariner*, added the sub-title of ' A Poet's Reverie ' to that poem in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he in no way improved matters. The semblance of a pro-

tracted evil dream is already inherent in the poem, but, if it were absent there, the mere giving of the title of dream to the poem would not bestow that character upon it. Hence the loose, formal and conventional relation of supernatural poetry to dreams, whether of gloomy midnight or of happy May morning, conceived in mediaeval fantasies, is replaced by a more intimate relation, *viz.*, that of qualitative resemblance. That it is possible to make the relation more intimate still, in fact to bring about an identity between the dream and its literary expression, by a mere change of the pictorial symbols into verbal ones, has been demonstrated by Coleridge in poetry and De Quincey in prose, both significantly enough confirmed opium-eaters. It may be the effect of opium or the achievement of art that in Coleridge's wonderful dream-poem the meddling intellect is kept at bay in the process of re-settling the dream into poetic language.

—The Significance of its second part:

The poem falls naturally into two parts,—the first being a transcript of the vision so far as the waking mind did retain it, and the second an attempt to realise or actualise it, to put it back into the concrete form in which it originally came to him,—'to build that dome in air,' Amphion-like, with music recalled out of a more distant dream. The two parts seem to represent respectively the flux of the dreaming mind and the re-flux of the

waking, and so the poem in spite of its fragmentary condition seems complete by itself.

The significance of the second part of the poem is worth careful consideration not only for what it actually sets down, but also for what it suggests and implies. The poet in the first part has translated the dream-imagery into words, reducing ' things ' into symbols. But in the process of passing through a different medium, the vivid reality of the dream, its glory and freshness, its deeply-felt intimacy with experience, has become blurred and attenuated. This indeed is the eternal failing and regret of all poets,—artists who employ a medium which cannot catch the living reality, but only its mental shadow. So the poet yearns to come out of the bondage of words and freely rebuild, not in the abstraction of language, but in the actuality and concreteness of vision, ' that sunny dome, those caves of ice.' No deliberative or volitional faculty of the mind can do it for the poet, but only the ' deep delight,' the creative joy or afflatus which raised poets in the ancient world to the rank of ' Vates.' For the spell which will evoke this inspired power, the poet returns to the dream-world in the true spirit of the romantic, trying to catch at a strange musical note that once haunted his dream :

" A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw :
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she play'd,
Singing of Mount Abora.

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice! "

Kubla Khan is thus at once a poetic illustration and an exemplification of one of the deepest spiritual experiences of the romantic poet which Shelley in his inimitably sublime prose has expressed thus :*

" A man cannot say, I will compose poetry. The greatest poet even cannot say it ; for the mind in creation is as fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness ; this power arises from within like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or of its departure.....When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of a poet."

In the second part of *Kubla Khan*, the poet is casting about for this ' invisible influence.' The mode of his search after it is characteristic. Milton, the Puritan poet, as we know, sought for the same ' invisible influence ' in " devout prayer to ' the eternal Spirit " ; Wordsworth in the spiritual

* *A Defence of Poetry.* See Shelley's *Essays and Letters*, Scott Library, p. 34.

emanations of Nature for which he waited so patiently in ' wise passiveness ' ; Coleridge, the dreamer, seeks for it characteristically in the witch-spell of a visionary dulcimer.

Minor Supernatural Poems of Coleridge

With these masterpieces of Coleridge, hang two minor poems connected with them through kinship of theme or idea.

The Raven, which precedes the *Ancient Mariner*, seems to foreshadow the latter through a recognisable similarity in the main theme. Here also a bird is wronged and avenged. But the grim realism with which the story is told, not without a certain effectiveness and impressiveness, represents the opposite pole of the elaborately romantic spirit of the later poem. The familiar raven has none of the glamour of the albatross of the polar seas, and the circumstances, under which the act is done and for which terrible revenge is exacted, belong to ordinary life and have none of the extraordinary complexion cast upon them in the other poem. The story proceeds in its straightforward course without wavering or turning back on itself or straying into incidental descriptions, and the conclusion is set in rubric as it were, with a lurid dash of supernatural colour :

> " Right glad was the Raven, and off he went fleet,
> And Death riding home on a cloud he did meet,
> And he thanked him again and again for this treat :
> They had taken his all, and Revenge was sweet."

The poem has the hard, clear ring of an old narrative ballad where a moving story, throbbing inly with suppressed emotion, is told in a straight, simple, matter-of-fact manner, amounting almost to a bare recital of facts.

The *Three Graves*, on the other hand, has more of conscious artistry even in its uninspired and obviously studied Wordsworthian simplicity. An evil mother's curse rests on three lives; its insidious influence works on each, but the manner of its working is differentiated in each case.

Edward is a morally healthy and mentally strong young farmer, but the idea 'discharged upon his imagination,' *viz.*, that a curse lies on his married life, becomes irresistible and plays havoc with his nerves. He bravely struggles against the sinister obsession; yet the fading condition of his poor wife preys upon his mind until her 'melancholy ways' drive him 'wild and weary.' He seeks relief in prayer and tries to keep the haunting thought under. But it gathers force like a dammed current and bursts out at an unexpected moment overwhelming him like a terrific nightmare.

Edward's wife, Mary, is a frail clinging creature who faints when she hears the mother's curse and broods over the torturing thought that:

"Beneath the foulest mother's curse
No child could ever thrive!
A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive."

She sinks gradually under the mental torture into a settled melancholy.

Ellen is a stronger and more self-possessed woman and she tries to make light of it, saying to herself :

" It was a wicked woman's curse—
God's good and what care I? "

Yet the curse, uttered audibly in the church, has its influence :

" Giddy she seemed, and sure, there was
A trouble in her eye."

She also strives resolutely against the idea, in stead of surrendering herself to it like her frail friend Mary, and goes about her daily round of duties with as much self-possession as she can command. Still there is ' a haunting in her brain ' which betrays itself in her nervous fidgetings. With what subtle psychological complications the ' haunting in her brain ' goes on is symbolised by the incident of her suddenly detecting a resemblance to her evil mother in Mary's face, as the latter hangs clinging round her neck, and shrieking forth in spite of herself the words that seem to be wrung out of her :

" Oh Christ! you're like your mother! "

The poem is an unfinished one, executed with a certain looseness and carelessness, and the poet on its publication modestly disclaimed poetic merit for it. But it again foreshadows, more clearly than *The Raven*, the greatest poetic achievement of

Coleridge to follow a few months later. There are two significant anticipations of the *Ancient Mariner* in the poem. The poem shows, in the first place, that the idea of the tragic inward play of a mental obsession, picked up by Coleridge from his out-of-the-way studies in the superstitions of savage people, has already taken hold of his mind. Coleridge had within him, as we have already seen,* a secret alchemy which was always touching and transforming ideas into artistic conceptions. In the *Three Graves*, the alchemy is already at work upon the idea of mental obsession, and in the *Ancient Mariner* we have its marvellous finishing touches. In the second place, we find some of the more delicate airs, appealing by an unforced, unstudied charm of sheer naïvete, which wind in and out of the richer music of the *Ancient Mariner*, carried on or reverberated from lines 385-389, 492-500 and 509-513 of this poem.

Coleridge says of this poem: "Its merits, if any, are exclusively psychological." The main motive, we are told, was to present a story proving "the possible effect on the imagination of an idea violently and suddenly impressed upon it" and illustrating "the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning."†

* See *supra*, pp. 244.

† See Coleridge's note on the poem in *Coleridge's Poetical Works*, ed. by H. Coleridge, p. 269.

The lure of psychology may easily tempt us into speculative regions whence the supernaturalism of the *Ancient Mariner* also may recede to the vanishing point. What the mother's curse is to Edward, Mary and Ellen, the thought of his supposed crime is to the Mariner. Taking this as the leading idea of the poem, we may press the Coleridgean argument and raise the question whether the experiences of the Mariner had any real bearing at all, or were after all the mere ' visual and sensible manifestations ' of ' the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning? ' The question in fact is mooted by Prof. Beers.* It is provoked by an obtrusive idea in the *Three Graves*, but by the artistic mode itself in the *Ancient Mariner*.

If we put on one side *The Raven* and the *Three Graves*, and on the other the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, we observe at once how in the latter poems a new quality has entered into supernaturalism,—a quality that marks off Coleridgean supernaturalism as almost a thing apart in supernatural poetry. It is the indefinable quality produced by the introduction of those half-lights,—vague uncertainties of vision and strange dubieties of experience,—which we may well believe to have been projected out of the irresolutions and vascillations of the poet's own ' subtle-woven and fine-vapoured temperament,' nursed by the congenial effects of the oriental

* See *supra*, p. 197.

narcotic.* But the artistic effect of this quality is remarkable: it is to raise the supernatural in his poetry out of the world of mere senses and sense-impressions into a finer, rarer atmosphere of psychological interest and wonder and mystery.

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* Mr. J. M. Robertson in his *New Essays towards a Critical Method* (1897) attributes the peculiar excellence of the *Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* to 'abnormal brain states' induced by opium. The author accounts for the difference in quality between Coleridge's earlier poems and his later poetic achievements by the change wrought in his mental faculties by the first effects of the use of opium. "So that what men regard as his mere bane, the drug to which he resorted as a relief from suffering.....is rather, by reason of its first magical effects, the special source of his literary immortality" (pp. 139-140).

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PART VI

THE SUPERNATURAL AS AN ELEMENT IN ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

(1820—1830)

THE SUPERNATURAL AS AN ELEMENT IN ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

Transition to Post-Coleridgean Supernaturalism

It was perhaps Hazlitt who first drew critical attention in his *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818-1819) to the origin of the so-called Lake School of English poetry in the ideas of the French Revolution. Their literary Rousseau-ism, sneered at by Hazlitt,* formed indeed the ideological basis for a new poetry of Nature and Man. We have observed how this Rousseau-ism shaped also Wordsworth and Coleridge's renovated conception of supernaturalism.† The supernatural, to their minds, had intimate implications with ' elementary feelings,'—it had the new stimulating and creative interest of humanity and nature. Conceiving of the supernatural as something profoundly interesting as human experience, they made the experience itself illustrative of man's inner and deeper

* " They (Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey) took the same method in their new-fangled ' metre ballad-mongering ' scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes, of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state." (See *Hazlitt's Lectures on English Poetry and the Spirit of the Age*, Everyman's Library, p. 163.)

† See *supra*, pp. 170-171.

consciousness and revelatory at the same time of forces that work outside the orbit of his sense-perceptions and rationalised thinking. Within the Rousseauistic ideas, which determined the romanticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the supernatural had a definite scope and purpose. But the romanticism of later poets like Keats and Shelley is scarcely coincident with the particular kind or range of interest, felt by the earlier generation, in the Revolutionary theme of nature and man. Hence that special lure which the supernatural experiences of man had to Wordsworth and Coleridge does not seem to touch the later romantic poets. The singleness and exclusiveness of the motive, showing the supernatural as significant psychologically or in relation to Nature,—are merged in a wider romantic outlook. Supernaturalism has no theoretical direction with Keats, Shelley and other poets of the age, nor any basis in the old ideas. But detaching itself from theories and ideas, it realises perhaps a closer identity with romanticism itself.

With the loss of the old groundwork, the form of treatment of the supernatural, *viz.*, that of a tale calculated to 'interest the affections' by 'the dramatic truth of emotions,' which had been shaped by a synthetic theory combining the natural and the supernatural,* was vacated of its significance. It is only imitatively and uncreatively that the 'Ancient Mariner' or 'Peter Bell' type of tale is reproduced in later romantic poetry, as by Hood in *Eugene Aram*.† Even Coleridge

* See *supra*, pp. 169-177.
† See *infra*, pp. 330-332.

divagates from this type, when freed from the pressure of his own critical mind by the magic effects of opium, in *Kubla Khan*. The substance and imagery of the poem had come to him along the way, not unfamiliar to the romantic spirit, of vision and dream. But in restoring and reshaping the shattered dream, he gave to its supernatural elements an altogether new imaginative value. Held in the stream of its fantastic imagery, they become purely romantic in their suggestion and significance, and *Kubla Khan* may be regarded, from this point of view, as a poem that anticipates a characteristic and distinctive quality of post-Coleridgean supernaturalism. The most crucial difference between the earlier and the later conception and treatment of the supernatural in romantic poetry,—between Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Keats and Shelley,—finds an interesting illustration in the transmutation by the later poets of older conceptions of the supernatural Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge, as we know, had stood near to the revived world of ancient ballads and legends, but to Keats and Shelley it was somewhat dim and distant. The new quality acquired by supernatural conceptions drawn from this world in the poetry of the latter is curiously indicative of the change which comes over the spirit of supernaturalism in later romantic poetry.

The ' woman wailing for her demon-lovêr ' has the old witchery and glamour for the imagination of Keats too, who reproduces the image with a subtle difference in the roundelay to Sorrow (st. 6) in Book IV of *Endymion*. The old-world tales of

amorous entanglements between earthly beings and unearthly go far back even to the Book of Genesis (ch. vi, v. 2). They touched the imagination of Coleridge, however, through supernatural ballads and legends of the tragedy of demon-love. The image in Coleridge's poem is a finely generalised impression, retained by the romantic spirit, of these weird ancient legends. The 'waning moon,' the savage background, the wildness of the passion, while emphasising the sense of a primaeval incident, connect themselves in legendary association with the demon-lover. But the vanished lover is no demon in Keats's poem. He is removed and distanced from the spirit of the supernatural legends and made a 'shadowy wooer from the clouds.'

Shelley's fantastically conceived comparison of the flight of forest-leaves, dead and pestilence-stricken, in the *Ode to the West Wind* to the rout of a swarm of ghosts from an enchanter carries a rarefied imaginative reminiscence. The old stories related of Michael Scotts and Lord Soulises stand shadowily behind the image.

So the 'magic casements' of Keats, whether suggested to his mind by Claude's picture or by the tradition about Goylen Castle,* is the last term of a persistent legend in

* See Colvin's *Life of Keats* (1918), p. 291 and foot-note, for Keats's acquaintance with the tradition about Goylen Castle. The description of the enchanted castle in Keats's *Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds* was inspired, as Keats says, by his remembrance of Claude's picture. It also has its 'magic casements' and a sea in front:

> "The doors all look as if they oped themselves,
> The windows as if latch'd by Fays and Elves."

literature. The castle with supernatural associations,—a real edifice in Spenser and mediaeval romances ;* a looming object of dim architecture and vague dimensions in the ' Gothic ' tales of the Walpole-Radcliffean school ;† an isolated haunt of fearful superstitions in legendary and narrative poetry,—seems to lose its reality, grow ' fainter, flushier, flightier ' in its long literary propagation, till in the receding distance the eye of Keats's imagination seems to glimpse only its row of casements outlined by the dying gleam of traditionary legend.

In such touches, by no means rare in later romantic poetry, what is evoked is clearly not the sense of the supernatural, —not the old associations of demonology, wizardy or ' faery,'—but a peculiar charm of distance, as of something strange, far-off and rare caught in the perspective of the mind. We may observe in these instances a process of imagination in which it becomes delicately difficult to draw a line between what is supernatural and what is romantic. In the poet's vision supernaturalism and romanticism mix their lights to-

and

" See ! what is coming from the distance dim !
A golden Galley all in silken trim ! "

* *E.g.*, ' the sinful House of Pride ' to which Duessa guides the Redcross Knight in Book I, Canto IV, and which also has its casements :

" Full of faire windowes, and delightfull bowres
And on the top a Diall told the timely howres." (st. 4.)

† See Eino Railo's *Haunted Castle*, pp. 7-13, where the features of the ' haunted castle ' in the novels of terror are analysed.

gether, and even when the theme or the matter is drawn from the supernatural world the effect that is achieved out of it becomes different and a little baffling. There is no such bafflement in the earlier treatment, as in the poetry of Scott or of Coleridge, in which the interest of the supernatural stands for its own sake.

In fact the mental climate and environment, in which the human and psychological conception of supernaturalism had germinated and flourished, did not lie round the later romantics. "To brood over the poetry of common things, to explore the workings of the untaught mind, to re-animate, for their own sake, the adventure and romance of the past, was no longer their inspiring aim." * The simple naturalism and humanity of Wordsworth and Coleridge were merged in a more comprehensive, if not stronger and steadier, poetic vision which was irradiated with a beauty, shed from art, mythology and literature, both classical and mediaeval, altogether richer and more complex than what had spoken to their predecessors from the face of Nature and the heart of man. When, therefore, the poets of the later generation touch upon or deal with the supernatural, it is not for the sake of the old 'soul-lore,' psychological interest or moral issues, but for its purely aesthetic or romantic appeal.

There are no doubt occasional harkings back. The Hermaphrodite in the *Witch of Atlas* recalls in

* See *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. xii, p. 57 (Prof. Herford on *Shelley*).

its creation the animated snow-images in *Thalaba*, a favourite work among Shelley's juvenile studies ;* the *Eve of St. Agnes* has the ' magic of atmosphere ' of *Christabel*, and in both the poems the maiden in the delicate spiritual loveliness of Spenserian conception, troubled with the first innocent rapture of love, stands in artistic relation to the atmosphere ; the ' measureless caverns ' and ' the deep romantic chasm ' of *Kubla Khan*, and also perhaps the haunted imagination of a lonely spirit adrift on the vast and unknown in the *Ancient Mariner*, have their lure for the poet of *Endymion* and, we might say, the poet of *Alastor*, but for the fact that the latter poem preceded the publication of *Kubla Khan*. But human interest or psychological implication is no longer a vital matter.

From this purely aesthetic or romantic direction of supernaturalism, a difference in the artistic treatment of the supernatural inevitably ensues. Tales, which in a different mode of treatment would yield merely the supernatural effect or convey the sense of weirdness, receive an emotional or lyrical moulding, the effect of which is to deflect the supernatural interest of the tale to subtler, remoter repercussions of feeling. The mere narrative substance, which in the Coleridgean human and psychological mode of supernaturalism seems so

* " He (Shelley) was (in his boyhood) enthusiastic about Southey's *Thalaba*, and later about Landor's *Gebir*, and he read translations of German ballads."—Campbell's *Shelley and the Unromantics*, p. 78. See also Mrs. Shelley's remark in the note on *Alastor* : " his favourite poem of *Thalaba* " (*Shelley's Poetical Works*, Oxford Ed., p. 39).

essential, has various degrees of artistic refinement in all later treatment of the supernatural in English poetry. We may trace this process in Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, later in Dobell's *Keith of Ravelston*, and more recently in the poems of Walter de La Mare. The tale remains lightly floating in the atmosphere or is ' diffused and distilled ' into it. While the ' magic of atmosphere,' initiated by Coleridge in *Christabel*, becomes more potent and operative, there appears also a certain temperamentalism in the treatment, modifying or transforming altogether the purely supernatural interest. We shall find how Keats's aestheticism works in *Isabella* to the transformation to a new romantic beauty of the ghastlier elements of Boccaccio's story, and the witchcraft and sorcery of a ' serpent-woman ' in *Lamia* are converted into the glamour of a love-enchantment of the antique world. Similarly, the visionary temper of Shelley's mind, intent on Platonic and cosmic dreams, transfigures the daughter of one of the Atlantides wholly out of the character of the ' lady-witch ' that Virgil gives her in the original passage of the *Aeneid*.

But apart from the external test of difference in treatment, the supernatural has a deeper inwardness in later romanticism : it seems indeed to go to the roots of the romantic imagination, growing so organically through its creative impulses that it can nó longer be viewed apart as a distinct motive. This organic unity between romanticism and supernaturalism gives the peculiar character to Keats's *Endymion* as well as to Shelley's allegorical fantasies from *Alastor* to the *Triumph of Life*.

It is not the traditional supernatural grounding in a sense of contrariety to Nature, but a higher projection of it into spheres of visionary imagination which transcend not only Nature, but reality itself.

In the class of poems referred to above, most of which are conceived in terms of some dynamic movement,—wandering, voyage, aerial flight or charioteering,—the romantic spirit projects itself and unfolds in its progress its yearnings, self-realisations, passions, convictions and faltering self-doubts. We come up in the course of the poet's spiritual vagabondage with those entities of the spirit Shelley personified into mourners for Adonais :

> " .....Desires and Adorations,
> Winged Persuasions and veiled Destinies,
> Splendours and Glooms and glimmering Incarnations
> Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies."

The symbolisms, in which the abstractions are clothed, may be gathered from the wardrobe of ancient classical myths or fashioned out of the poet's own fantasy, like the Veil, the Eagle and Serpent, or the Boat and Stream, in Shelley's poetry. But the movement,—action and machinery,—even though it be professedly mythological or purely fantastic, catches intuitively the mystery, enchantment and magic of the romantic supernatural. The vision of the poet is not the steady unsurprised classical vision of an Ovid, for example, dealing with the wonders of metamorphosis. The moon-mytho-

logy of *Endymion* is a convincing example and illustration of it, but even into Keats's more clear-eyed Hellenism in *Hyperion*, a side wind seems to sweep in this magic and enchantment, as in the epic simile in Book I (ll. 72-78), describing the effect of Thea's passionate words to Saturn, in which the 'tranced summer-night' and the magic dream of the oaks, 'branch-charmed by the earnest stars,' call up unexpectedly an image of Nature struck by supernatural influence. The working of the supernatural yeast in the ferment of the romantic imagination is curiously betrayed by an instance like this.

In dealing with the supernaturalism of the later romantic poets therefore, we have not to look for the apparent poetic motive, but go deeper and trace in the poet's imaginative growth and process the influence or evolution of a supernatural vision.

Keats

The well-known passage in *Sleep and Poetry*, in which Keats makes a veiled reference to 'strange thunders from the potency of song' in a 'fairer season' of poetry, has lent itself to various interpretations.* But if by the themes, which are 'ugly clubs' of Polyphemus, the poet was really referring to Southey's and Coleridge's supernatural themes,

* See discussion on the meaning of the passage in Colvin's *Life of Keats* (1918), p. 121, and also DeSelincourt's note in his edition of Keats's poems, p. 409. According to the latter authority, Keats is 'here thinking chiefly of Byron.'

we may well understand the reaction of a young spirit, preoccupied with the 'deliciousness of things,' to what had become the predominant conception of the supernatural in romantic poetry. We have seen how, outside mediaevalistic treatment, it had shaped itself as a tragic inexplicable power presented either in crude morbid horrors or in Coleridge's subtler psychological mode.* The revulsion from it of a poet who holds out the laurel-crown to those 'who simply tell the most heart-easing things' is at any rate intelligible.

From the 'swooning delights' and aesthetic cravings which fill the volume of 1817, Keats passed on in *Endymion* to the ardours and endeavours of what he calls 'Imagination' and 'Invention.'† The quest for beauty is its supremely ideal aspect is endowed here with the concrete imaginative forms of 'the beautiful mythology of Greece.'‡ The Endymion legend is amplified and extended with accessory myths like those of Cybele, Glaucus and Scylla, and Arethusa, mutually unrelated in mythology, but brought into connection with the central theme by the sweep of a vagabond imagination. But though Keats is occupied in this poem with classical mythology and expresses in the Preface the hope that he has not 'dulled its brightness,' the poem is hardly Hellenic in the same sense as *Hyperion* is. In the somewhat wobbly wheelings of its mythological machinery is caught

* See Part III, *supra* and pp. 165-166.

† See Letter to Bailey (Colvin's *Letters*, p. 34).

‡ See Keats's Preface to *Endymion*.

up much that is in no wise kin to classical myth, un-Grecian and of a fantastic or phantasmagoric kind absorbed by Keats's mind from Spenser and the Elizabethans, and, as Colvin suggests, the *Arabian Nights* and French romances.* Perhaps it is illustrated by the Second Book of the poem more amply than by any other,—with its 'fairy-quick' changes, the bud becoming a butterfly and the butterfly a nymph, its descent into the 'sparry hollows of the world,' its underground marvels crowded into a space:

> "..... nor bright, nor sombre wholly,
> But mingled up; a gleaming melancholy;
> A dusky empire and its diadems;
> One faint eternal eventide of gems."
> (ll. 222-225.)

The old romance of the purely marvellous, felt dreamily, in the spirit exactly of the Renaissance poets and the Elizabethans who were Keats's spiritual ancestors, breathes thick through the old call of romance echoed in the Book,—'And, lo, wonderment!' (l. 384).

Keats's Imaginative Development

Between the allegorical fantasy of *Endymion* and Keats's treatment of the supernatural in *Isabella* and other romantic tales, the difference is

* See Colvin's *Life of Keats* (1918), pp. 173-175.

wrought by the poet's imaginative growth. We may suppose *Endymion* to have been composed in what Keats, in his well-known 'Mansion of Life' letter, describes as the 'chamber of maiden thought.'* The idea of a progressive spirit informing Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' poem is reconceived partially by Keats under the figure of a mansion of many apartments of which the first two are described. In the second chamber of the mansion, the spirit, as the poet says, is 'intoxicated by the light and the atmosphere and sees nothing but pleasant wonders,'—and perhaps it is not fantastic to recognise it as the condition of the spirit out of which *Endymion* was produced. But the chamber has magical properties,—its 'pleasant wonders' fade away, it darkens gradually, and 'dark doors open out of it leading to dark passages.' Perhaps by the symbolism the poet expressed the feeling-out of his own mind, out of the mythological marvels of *Endymion* towards the mysteries of human life behind its daylight externality.

This letter, a document of the utmost importance in the study of the relation between Keats's mind and art, seems to indicate with some definiteness the trend and direction of an obscure impulse which haunted him throughout the curiously foreshortened course of his mental development. It was an impulse to escape even within his own self from something lower to higher, something less intense to more, the first expression of which in Keats's poetry is contained in the passage in *Sleep*

* Letter to J. H. Reynolds (See Colvin's *Letters*, pp. 107-108).

and Poetry where the poet resolves to pass from the 'realm of Flora and old Pan' to a 'nobler life' (ll. 123-126). This 'nobler life' is vaguely conceived of as the spirit's dynamic energy, manifesting itself in 'the agonies, the strife of human hearts,' and is imaged in the figure of the charioteer furiously driving through space. The impulse must have grown stronger in him with the study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, impressing a new conviction on his mind that the condition for the highest poetic vision lay not in reverie going off into such ecstatic trances as are described in the *Epistle to my brother George* or such as may be supposed to have been the source of much that is purely marvellous in *Endymion*.

Yet it is significant that the conviction does not lead him, as one might expect, to the Wordsworthian or the early romantic (as in Scott) treatment of life. 'The mighty abstract Idea of Beauty,' the genius and daemon of his poetic being, seems to intervene and turn 'the agonies, the strife of human hearts' from psychological truth to truth of a different order, *viz.*, the truth of beauty.

"What the imagination seizes on as beauty must be truth,"—so Keats had affirmed in a letter dated as early as November 22, 1817,—"whether it existed before or not,—for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty."* When intimacy with Shakespeare's tragedies and Wordsworth's poetry turned his mind towards the

* Letter to Bailey (Colvin's *Letters*, p. 41).

' dark doors ' and the ' dark passages ' of the ' Chamber of Maiden Thought,' the quest for Beauty still remained with him. With certain aspects of human life, Shakespeare and also Keats's immediate predecessors like Wordsworth and Coleridge had brought the supernatural into imaginative relation, its tragic influence coming into life just where ' action is transitory,' but ' suffering permanent, obscure and dark, And has the nature of infinity.'* Their impact on Keats's mind may account for his selection for poetic treatment of a tragic story of suffering and supernatural visitation from the *Decameron* as his contribution to a projected volume of metrical tales from Boccaccio to be written jointly by Reynolds and himself.

From his concentration in *Isabella* on Boccaccio's story, the poet came perhaps to realise what the allegorical and mythological conception of *Endymion* had precluded, *viz.*, an imaginative value of the supernatural not as myth or fantasy, but as an influence on human life. But in this new relation, he seems to have seen in the supernatural only a phase of ' passional ' beauty that had ' swum into his ken ' and treated of it accordingly in a completely aesthetic spirit.

Keats's Mediaeval Romantic Tales

Isabella and the *Eve of St. Agnes*, as well as *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *Lamia*, tell of crossed or thwarted passion. They seem to hearken in spirit to ' the agonies, the

* See Wordsworth's lines from the *Borderers*; III, v. prefixed to the *White Doe of Rylstone.*

strife of human hearts' of the passage in *Sleep and Poetry*, and to the ' misery and heart-break, pain, sickness and oppression ' of the later ' Mansion of Life ' letter. Yet they have little bearing on human realities and scant relation to the issues of life and death. In them we are straight under the old spell of the ' Queen of Far Away,' of Golden-tongued Romance, though not this time with her ' serene lute.'* The sleepless grief of Isabella, the strenuous love of Porphyro, the tragedy of Lycius, are kept free from implications with real life and are put back in visionary distance of time and environments so that their peculiar old-world beauty may remain unsoiled. It is a rich impassioned beauty, not immediately realised, but felt as visionary and long past,—a beam of light that once on a time had struck athwart the current of human life and then faded quickly away.

In each of these poems, the suggestion of a fugitive fragment of life recovered from a romantic past insinuates itself. When the story is told and done with in *Isabella*, the link with the past is found in the reference, set down as a matter of fact in Boccaccio's story, to the old popular ditty :

" And a sad ditty of this story born
From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd:
Still is the burthen sung—' O cruelty,
To steal my Basil-pot away from me! "

* " O Golden-tongued Romance with serene lute :
Fair-plumed Syren ! Queen of far away ! "
—Keats's Sonnet on *Sitting down to read King Lear once again.*

A similar suggestion of a long past, out of which the story has been recovered in all its glow of life and romance, occurs at the end of the *Eve of St. Agnes* and throws backwards over its incidents all the glamour of distance :

> " And they are gone : ay, ages long ago
> These lovers fled away into the storm."

The originating note of *La Belle Dame sans Merci* comes casually in the same poem :

> " He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
> In Provence call'd ' La belle dame sans mercy : "

Lamia, whether we regard it as imaginative autobiography, as Middleton Murry holds,* or as an allegory, or as a purely romantic tale, hangs upon the charmed words ' Upon a time,' and the poem perhaps shaped itself in the poet's mind under the exquisite spell of those words which directly call up the opening vision of the mysterious Cretan forest.

Isabella.—It is in this tone of distant beauty shed from a receded world of romance that the mediaeval story of Boccaccio is reconceived by Keats. The effect on the macabre elements of the story in Keats's treatment is remarkable.

The tale is at first rehabilitated to romance. As Prof. Raleigh notices, there is a class of stories in the *Decameron* which may be labelled as ' newspaper stories,' picked up

* *Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 157.

from floating gossip and popular legend,* and 'Isabella' undoubtedly belongs to this class. Its sensational incidents, spiced with a little flavour of the supernatural, had perhaps made some stir in the unromantic business world of Messina, which by the way is converted by Keats into the more romantic city of Florence, and survived in the theme of a popular ditty. So Philomena, the narrator of the story in the *Decameron*, prefaces it with a sort of apology: "My novel will not be concerning people of such high rank as those about whom Eliza has now been relating."† This story of ordinary life, of mismatched love between a factor and his employer's sister and a sordid murder and a ghost's visitation, leaps at once in Keats's poem to the colour and glow of romance:

> "Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
> Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
> They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
> Without some stir of heart, some malady."

The original gossipy interest of the story is thrown back at once into the atmosphere of mediaeval romance, touched, as usual in mediaeval love-romances, with a kind of sickly languishment. The factor, we observe, becomes 'a young palmer in Love's eye'; Isabella, said to be 'a lady of worth and beauty,' a languishing heroine of love; the

* See Raleigh's *Some Authors* (on Boccaccio), p. 11.

† Translation of *The Decameron* (Chatto and Windus), p. 235.

ghost of Lorenzo, a strange figure of constrained and lonely passion; and it is necessary only to refer to the original to appreciate the peculiar heightening and aestheticizing of Keats's treatment.

Caught in this process and strained through this atmosphere, the repulsive and the purely sensational elements of the story are wholly romanticized. The 'disagreeables,' in Keats's words, 'evaporate,'* and the ghost that comes into the poem from the *Decameron* tale is shuffled wholly out of its ragged flesh-and-blood grossness.

Perhaps behind the appearance of the ghost in Boccaccio's story, the old superstition, presented with infinite tenderness in the ballad of the *Wife of Usher's Well*, remains as the motive. Isabella's excessive grieving calls up Lorenzo out of his shallow grave, as the mother's grieving in the ballad does her drowned children. "Till one night it happened, that having wept herself asleep, he appeared to her in a dream, all pale and ghastly, with clothes rent in pieces; and she thought he spoke to her thus: 'My dear Isabel, thou grievest incessantly for my absence, and art continually calling upon me, but know that I can no more return to thee, for the last day thou sawest me, thy brothers put me to death.'" † Keats takes the hint from the story, but he lengthens out Isabella's course of grief and heightens its passion to ecstasy, thus making the

* The point has been fully and elaborately dealt with by Sidney Colvin. See *Life of Keats* (1918), pp. 393 *et seq.*

† Translation of *The Decameron* (Chatto and Windus), p. 236.

ghost 'accrete objectivity,' as Coleridge would have put it, from the stress of her ecstatic mood.

Isabella at first has hallucinations of her lover :

" His image in the dusk she seem'd to see
And to the silence made a gentle moan,
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
And on her couch low murmuring,
'Where? O Where?' " (st. xxx.)

Nature seems thereafter to take the tone of her mind, and in the mid-days of autumn the breath of winter comes from far away and plays a 'roundelay of death.' Into this grief-charged atmosphere,—Nature decaying slowly with the decaying maiden,—the spectre comes shadowily from the 'skirts of human nature,' combining the earth's dull earthiness with the faint passion of buried humanity.

The ghostly passion recalls the pathetic ring of the old ballad :

" Is there any room at your head, Willy?
Or any room at your feet?
Or any room at your side, Willy,
Wherein that I may creep?

" There's no room at my head, Margaret,
There's no room at my feet:
There's no room at my side, Margaret,
For a lady to lie and sleep."
(*Sweet William's Ghost.*)

This note of constraint, of the absolute isolation of the grave, of the hopelessness of re-union with life,

is breathed with many fine yearning reverberations in the ' ghostly undersong ' in *Isabella*. Everything is represented as waning, faltering and fainting away slowly, but surely, towards the stern ultimate silence. The subtle magic of the sound and imagery of the ghost's speech is caught from this sense of gradual attrition and attenuation, of slow evanescence and decay. The poem, with its diverse elements of love, crime, grief, spectral appearance and sepulchral horrors, is unified by a single-toned feeling for beauty and romance,—though the beauty seems over-ripe and distempered in places and the romance too showily deployed,—and the supernatural, falling into this tone of feeling, is refined completely out of its macabre property into one of the finer romantic elements of the poem.

The Eve of St. Agnes.—Even more finely and delicately and with a subtler romantic effect is the supernatural conceived in the *Eve of St. Agnes*. The motive of the poem is a quaintly beautiful mediaeval superstition, but the imaginative treatment wholly outgrows the motive. Madeline performs duly the simple rites of the holy eve, retires to the hush and seclusion of her chamber for a vision of her absent lover, and Porphyro, ' with heart on fire for Madeline,' comes meantime across the moors, gains access to her chamber and appears before her like the bodily fulfilment of the promise held out in the superstition.

But the superstition and its due fulfilment become a matter of machinery only, and the real imaginative effect of the poem turns scarcely upon

it. The sense of the blissful passion of youth, thwarted and held at bay by contrariety and deadly feud, of which *Romeo and Juliet* is the most consummate dramatic expression, is worked out not so much in story and action in this poem as rendered in an artistic contrast inherent in the atmosphere,—the contrast between "the cold, the storm, the old age, the empty pleasure and noisy enmity of the world outside Madeline's chamber, and the glow, the hush, the rich and dreamy bliss within it."*

Yet the contrast seems to resolve itself miraculously as the thrills, ecstasies and trepidations of love move on to the hour of destined fulfilment. There is a stir in the life of Nature, held bound so long in the wintry moon's bewitching spell :

"……Meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum, pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set."
(st. xxxvi.)

It is 'love's alarum' which becomes momentarily more insistent :

"'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:"

And again :

"'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:"

Suddenly to the lover's high-pitched intuition, it

* Bradley's *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 233.

flashes forth its meaning : it is an imperious call to them sent from the land of ' faery ' :

" Hark! 'tis an elfin storm from faery land,
Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed: "
(st. xxxix.)

The storm from the elf-land comes as a fairy boon to the aid of love and beauty, covering their hurried flight, and

" They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall!
Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide."
(st. xli.)

When the lovers have vanished phantom-like into the elfin storm, the final impression that is left is as though a gleam of supernatural beauty has slanted off the scene into far distance, both of time and of space, and we are back again to the ugly realities,—the drunken Baron and his warrior guests horribly be-nightmared, palsied Angela 'with meagre face deform,' and the Beadsman repeating his aves like an automaton.

Prof. Beers, who calls the *Eve of St. Agnes* ' the most direct descendant ' of *Christabel*, points out certain parallelisms and divergences between the two poems.* But their likeness is somewhat external and superficial,—both containing an artistic atmosphere, the figure of a love-troubled maiden of delicate loveliness and innocence, and passages

* *English Romanticism in the 19th Century*, pp. 85 and 126.

of similar decorative description. Their unlikeness, however, goes deeper than the mere difference of poetic methods, as Prof. Beers supposes, to a fundamental divergence in motivation. From this divergence springs also the difference in the artistic treatment of the atmosphere in the two poems. In *Christabel*, the motive of supernaturalism is introduced and worked out from the very beginning, and the haunted atmosphere yields, as through a parting of the screen, the preliminary movement of the story. But the tale in Keats's conception, though arising initially out of a superstition and its miraculous fulfilment, fashions itself not as a supernatural but a purely romantic episode in which light touches of the supernatural (sts. xiv and xix) appear only to flash up the picture of mediaeval times,—all the atmosphere of wintriness, senility and preparedness for feud serving as a hard rough shell to enclose the warm glowing jewel of the secret love-romance. The supernatural as supernatural has no further effect, but recalled in finer, subtler romance in the elfin storm, it takes part in the final resolution of conflict.

La Belle Dame sans Merci and *Lamia*

We have observed how in *Isabella* and the *Eve of St. Agnes* the supernatural comes into Keats's poetic vision with a new colour of human interest. Yet it impinges on life, on a destined suffering or joy, lightly, curiously and without penetrative effect, as typified by the fading ghost in *Isabella* or

the magic activity of the storm, too fine and delicate to be obtrusive or even palpable, in the *Eve of St. Agnes*. From them, we pass on to the two poems in which the supernatural appears as a terrible sinister power, a symbol and agent of tragic fate.

But there is really no regress in these poems on the Coleridgean conception of supernaturalism, for the impulse of imagination which projected this conception of the supernatural originated in Keats's own intimate experiences. Middleton Murry, reading into Keats's poetry the immediate repercussions of his life, has sought to interpret the *Eve of St. Agnes* as the poet's 'dream-consummation of his love for Fanny Brawne,' *La Belle Dame sans Merci* as the expression of the anguish of a love realised to be impossible, and *Lamia* as 'imaginative autobiography of the most exact and faithful kind.' * It is probable that the sense of dark tragedy and fateful spiritual discord, which informs the two latter poems, was evolved out of the poet's inner personal experiences. But for the imaginative embodiment of this sense he went back again to the charmed world of romance and mythology.

The intimacy with the older poets had, as we have seen, turned the mind of Keats from fantasy to the passional and emotional aspects of human life, and in passing on to the more poignant struggles and discords of the human spirit in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *Lamia*, he was perhaps attempting to reproduce in a different way of

* *Keats and Shakespeare*, pp. 110, 124 and 157.

imagination what he had 'burnt through' in reading *King Lear*:*

> "..... the fierce dispute
> Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay."

This tragic dispute lies at the core of both *La Belle* and *Lamia*, and it is presented in relation to a supernatural enchantment. In Keats's imaginative fibre, however, there seems to have been a latent weakness somewhere, for 'dispute' can never gather resolution and become 'fierce' in his poetry, not even where it may have been most expected, in the Miltonic conception of the epic of *Hyperion*. It is dissolved almost without a struggle to retreat or surrender. The power of the supernatural in these poems arises really not from a deliberate stressing of it, but from the ravished self-surrender of its victims.

The knight's passion in *La Belle* is passion in a trance, caught, as it were, in a sort of psychic compulsion. It cannot lay itself out, but is led blindly in thrall by resistless witchery:

> "I set her on my pacing steed
> And nothing else saw all day long,
> For sidelong would she bend and sing
> A faery's song."

The 'kisses four,' with which the knight shut her wild, wild eyes and which were expunged by the poet in the later version, do not deserve perhaps to be waved away by Keats's playful remark upon

* Sonnet on *Sitting down to read King Lear once more.*

them. The kind of automatism to which the knight's passion is reduced under the fairy spell is well illustrated by the numbered kisses, as though the spell-bound knight could give as many as were allowed and not one kiss more. So Lycius in *Lamia* has to yield at once to the wily words of the enchantress in the true Keatsian spirit of unquestioning self-surrender to beauty :

> " For so delicious were the words she sung,
> It seem'd he had lov'd them a whole summer long:
> And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
> Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
> And still the cup was full,—while he, afraid
> Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid
> Due adoration, thus began to adore;"
>
> (Part I, ll. 249-255.)

So the spell thickens upon Lycius and dwells with him in ' that purple-lined palace of sweet sin ' at Corinth until the fatal moment of disillusionment.

While Keats's peculiar treatment, bodied forth in romance and mythology, of the ' dispute betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay ' gives to the supernatural enchantment in both poems a new stress and power, the perfect mediaevalism of *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and the Hellenism of *Lamia* offer an outstanding contrast.

The knight in the former poem, a solitary unrelated figure seeming to lapse out of the still and dreary wanness of late autumn, when ' no birds sing,' belongs really to the cycle of mediaeval Tannhäusser legends. But the legendary material is implicit in the poem, and what would have pro-

duced the unearthly and marvellous or a poignant psychological effect in purely narrative treatment comes in this poem with lyrical appeal, with haunting suggestions of mystery that centres round the knight's vision and the fairy's spell.

For the temptress in this poem is not the usual demoniac being, disguised in fairy shape like Scott's Green Fairy of Glenfinlas. The vision dilates her to mysterious proportions: she figures forth as the re-incarnate Venus of the Middle Ages, her divinity transformed by the strange spirituality of the mediaeval mind in holy dread of the most splendid of all pagan goddesses. She is the One, the pulse of whose celestial passion had smitten, in the spacious old ages, kings, princes and warriors and left them pale with death, and the knight sees their 'starv'd lips in the gloam With horrid warning gaping wide.'

The magnified reverberations of these lines sound plangently in Swinburne's *Dolores*. But while Swinburne's conception of the enchantress harks back to the splendour and grandeur of the classical goddess, Keats's emphasises rather the Circean cruelty into which her glory faded in her mediaeval re-incarnation. To this Venus in her mediaeval aspect, Keats gives a new designation suggested to him by the title merely of a mediaeval French poem.

As the tale comes, freighted with its visionary mystery, full circle to the initial note of desolation, to the magic words borrowed from the treasury of Elizabethan poetry, 'And no birds sing,' the desolation becomes suddenly surcharged with meaning.

The mediaeval legends tell us of the aftermath of such an experience as the knight has. It is the yearning to which the knight in Swinburne's *Laus Veneris* gives such reckless and passionate utterance :

" .....Yes, Lord, a little bliss,
Brief bitter bliss, one hath for a great sin;
Nathless thou knowest how sweet a thing it is."

Perhaps Keats's knight too has the same yearning, as he lingers by the sedgy lake, for the impossible chance of recapturing the vanished fairy bliss. But the poem is exquisitely painful in its reticence, and between the knight's vision of the cruel and splendid Venus and ' That is why I linger here,' there is only silence, charged, however, with reminiscences of a hundred mediaeval legends of devastation wrought by fairy love.

While the very cast of the passion, the suppressed ground-tone of paganism which underlies the legends of Tannhäuser cycle, the peculiar nature of the supernatural entanglements in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* come straight out of the mediaeval world, the story of love-enchantment in *Lamia* brings something of the gay flavour and antique charm of the classical world and a semi-mythological age.

The Cretan forest out of which Lamia emerges is a dim underworld of

" Things born of a wish—to endure for a thought
Or last long ages,—to vanish to nought
Or put on new semblance."

(Hood's *Lycus the Centaur.*)

It is a mythological world where life, untrammelled by physical grossness, can flow at will from shape to shape; dreams are realities and realities but dreams; and the spirit and the body are scarcely divided. The only pulse of real life that beats in this world is one of fevered amorous passion.

The celestial magic, which the Greeks conceived in their myths of metamorphosis, throbs and pulsates in its atmosphere. The wood-nymph's 'immortality' grows pale for woe of lovers whose loves she cannot return and she makes herself invisible by steeping her hair in 'weird syrop'; Lamia breathes upon Hermes's eyes and the nymph reappears,—no matter whether in reality or in a dream:

> "It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
> Real are the dreams of gods, and smoothly pass
> Their pleasures in a long immortal dream."
> (Part I, ll. 126-128.)

Lamia slowly sheds her serpentine glories and melts and disappears into a plaintive amorous voice; but she reappears presently in a woman's form, a real maid of innocent-seeming beauty:

> "More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
> Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flowered lea
> Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy:"
> (Part I, ll. 186-188.)

Her passion for Lycius is of a similar magic origin, growing out of her spirit-vagabondage and psychical experiences.

Now, if we apply to Keats's art in Part 1 of *Lamia* the Coleridgean principle of ' suspension of disbelief,' a difference in artistic treatment and effect comes into prominence. It is not by presenting supernatural incidents in ' dramatic truth ' that the effect of ' suspension of disbelief ' is achieved, but by simply putting the whole back into a conceivable atmosphere where the supernatural is normal. The metamorphosis of the serpent is of a piece with all other celestial miracles about which disbelief is suspended because the poet's imagination has already isolated them from reality by presuming them as happenings in a mythical world,—mythical in its nature, yet realised with wonderful vividness. The more realistic narrative of Lycius's subsequent relations with Lamia, of which the miracles of the Cretan forest form the source and background, is also sustained in a large measure by the mythical, the magical and the illusory.

Thus the transition from the region of myth and metamorphosis to the real city of Corinth is made acceptable to the imagination by the tranced state of Lycius. A real journey, punctuated with topographical landmarks, would have shattered the spell at once. But Lycius moves in a spell-bound trance :

> " The way was short, for Lamia's eagerness
> Made, by a spell, the triple league decrease
> To a few paces; not at all surmised
> By blinded Lycius, so in her comprized."
>
> (Part I, ll. 343-346.)

And, as they approach the city of Corinth, its flaring lights and multitudinous sounds appear dream-like to his charmed consciousness. The famous passage where the poet describes them in their dreamy far-off sound and appearance is perhaps conceived subjectively with reference to Lycius's state of mind :

> " As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,
> Throughout her palaces imperial,
> And all her populous streets and temples lewd,
> Mutter'd like tempest in the distance brew'd,
> To the wide-spreaded night above her towers."
>
> (Part I, ll. 350-354.)

Reality breaks in upon the tone of magic, enchantment, trance and illusion in the shape of the sage Apollonius who, with his ' curl'd gray beard, sharp eyes, and smooth bald crown,' is destined to bring the enchantress's magic to its tragic end.

Though the cynical comment at the beginning of the second part, quite alien from the spirit of the poem, intrudes as something wholly excrescent and in the nature of an artistic blemish, there is no such breach of emotional tension or imaginative continuity as between the two parts of *Christabel*. The descent from the distant obscurities of the Cretan forest, haunted by gods, wood-nymphs and semi-celestial beings, down to the nuptial banquet at Corinth, with its splendour of service, flow of wine and genial buzz of talk, is managed by keeping up a sort of witchery, glamour and illusoriness in all the circumstances. Thus the shock of passing from

myth to reality is almost entirely absorbed. Besides, the story is sustained with a narrative power which Keats seems to have derived from Dryden even in happening to use Dryden's poetic form and metre. The slightest wavering of the narrative, any Keatsian dalliance with 'wayside beauties,' would perhaps have broken instantaneously the spell of the story. On this spell, however, the confused allegory at the end encroaches like a muddy tributary current, and it is fortunate that the allegory of the poem did not preside either at its birth or over its development, but came only later in an afterthought.

Beddoes and his Ghost-lyrics

The poems of Keats,—*Isabella*, the *Eve of St. Agnes*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *Lamia*,—conceived as they are in different impulses and modes of imagination and widely various in tone and temper, show in common a conception of the supernatural different from Wordsworth's or Coleridge's. It is very nearly akin to the romantic feeling itself for remoteness, strangeness and beauty. The grosser elements,—ghostly, elfin or magical,—are reproduced by an imaginative process finer and more tactile, no longer circumscribed by the preconception of a tragic power discharged on human life from the invisible world.

The tendency of post-Coleridgean supernaturalism to purely aesthetic or romantic effects is not peculiar to Keats. A test and touch-stone of this

tendency is afforded by the curious transformation in it of an old supernatural motive.

The ghost of the dead lover coming out of the grave to meet the object of his earthly love dates back to ancient ballads and legends. But in passing through the nuances of romantic feeling, the ghostly properties of the old ghost seem to shrink back to give place to new refinements of his ghostly passion. The associations of decayed physical existence are just allowed to remain, but they melt into faint suggestions in the palpitant emotional atmosphere. The ghost who goes to the cottage-door of his mistress at midnight, ' twirls the door-pin ' and vanishes at cock-crow has a clear corporeality, but in Bürger's *Lenore*, the revenant has a more illusory character in his speech and person until the bones appear shockingly towards the end. In Keats's *Isabella*, he is refined to a pale shadow, though with the marks upon him of the hideous death-blow and the traces of devastation that the grave works on the corpse. From Keats, the note of emotional refinement in dealing with the lover's ghost is passed on to Beddoes whose ghost-lyrics, a mere child's handful and flawed with many blemishes of expression, are yet a new thing in English supernatural poetry.

The characterisation of Beddoes as a ' Gothic Keats ' * is appropriate in the sense that the inti-

* " Beddoes has been described as a Gothic Keats, and the description is an apt one. It expresses, not merely the special fascination which Gothic subjects exerted upon his mind, comparable to the rapture with which Keats was inspired by Hellenic mythology, but the concrete method of treatment characteristic of both poets."—

macy of temperamental sympathy with which Keats approaches the ideally beautiful world of Greek mythology is brought to bear by Beddoes on the grim and grotesque conceptions of the Gothic mind. This ' Gothicism ' finds its freest play in *Death's Jest-Book*, in which the most outstanding scene represents a gang of conspirators sitting down to wine and debauch at a board surrounded invisibly by a rout of revelling mocking skeletal ghosts. Yet when Beddoes comes out of this melodramatic sensationalism which was fostered in him by his German tastes and studies and lends himself to finer romantic suggestions, his ghosts seem to hide their grisly skeletons and speak in other tones.

In the short and somewhat loose-knit lyric of *The Old Ghost*, over whom the waters of the sea have flowed a thousand years or more, leaving him in his lonely watery grave ' pale and wan and weary,' we catch an echo, however feeble, of the ' ghostly undersong ' in *Isabella*. Within his thin worn existence, there is yet the faint pulse of an ancient earthly passion which drags him out of the ocean-depths to a long forsaken churchyard on the shore. He yearns to weep there over the grave of a maiden that ' lay so young among the thistles and toadstools so hoary.' Nature mocks, however, at his impossible passion,—

" And he begged of the waters a tear,
But they shook upwards their moonlight glory,
And the shark looked on with a sneer
At his yearning desire and agony."

Richard Garnett on Beddoes (See *Poets and the Poetry of the Century*, ed. by Miles, vol. ' Keats to Lytton ' : Intro. to Beddoes).

In the *Phantom-wooer*, the same irrepressible passion of a ghost for the woman loved in life-time is represented in a rarefied, suggestive and emotional strain, and though the lyric points unmistakably to the old ballads on the same theme, it is wholly different in imaginative associations. The horror within the putrid sepulchral gloom is brought out in the alluring disguise of beauty :

" The little snakes of silver throat,
In mossy skulls that rest and lie,
Ever singing, ' Die, oh ! die ! ' "

Death spreads a lure for life, working subtly on that mysterious inversion of values in the deeper layers of our consciousness which is exploited by Baudelaire in his ' Flowers of Evils ' and by his followers of the so-called ' decadent school.'

Hood.

Hood, who comes in the wake of Keats and Shelley, is decidedly a poet whose inspiration, except in burlesque and satirical verse, is almost always at second hand. Having no unifying poetic personality and relying mainly on the literary influences on his mind of other romantic poets, he seems to move in divided spirit, in the poems written by him in his romantic temper, between the earlier Coleridgean supernaturalism and the later Keatsian. Between the lovely fairy-land or the fantastic mythological world, in which he

basks in the mixed beams of Spenser and Keats, of the *Two Swans*, *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* and *Lycus the Centaur*, and the weird and haunted atmosphere of the *Elm Tree*, the *Haunted House* and *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, the difference is palpable.

In some of his burlesque ballads, Hood shows how a touch of realism, a whiff from the work-a-day world, a turn in the direction of triviality can bring down at once the fabric of a supernatural story. Between the old ghost-ballads and Hood's caricatures of them in *Faithless Nelly Gray*, *Mary's Ghost*, *The Ghost* and *The Supper Superstition*, the difference lies in that the themes are wrenched out of the emotional atmosphere and thrust into relations with naked reality. It is the divergence in the appearance of such themes, taken out of their proper setting, that lends itself to the art of the caricaturist. Between the story of Tim Turpin and that of Eugene Aram, there is a common ground of grim tragic irony. But the story of blind Turpin, divested of all emotional atmosphere, shows only the grotesque ugliness of the crime,—so grotesquely indeed as to obscure any other feeling about it. These caricatures almost suggest that Hood must have supposed that a supernatural tale in order to sustain itself artistically needs to be isolated from all contact with life and confined to its own proper world of vision or romantic emotion.

The visionary setting, the tune and movement of the lovely fantasy of the *Two Swans* are delicately Spenserian, with the charm of an occasional echo

from the earlier poet wafted in here and there, as in the line :

" So may all gentle Love ungentle Malice foil."

Hood's Spenserianism comes through the medium of Keats and takes therefrom a richer and warmer glow of colour and imagery. The poem is a projection of the influence of the *Eve of St. Agnes* into a more visionary and out-of-the-world atmosphere, from which the human note of Keats's poem appears to be alien. But the incidents of the release of the victim from the dread enchantment and the transformation of the swans into ' gentle girl and boy ' are, as Prof. Elton remarks, ' lovely after-coinages in Keats's own fashion.' *

The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies is another fantasy, lighter and happier in conception and better sustained, in which the temper shifts between gaiety and melancholy, celebrating by an allegory, as the poet says in the dedicatory letter to Charles Lamb, " that immortality which Shakespeare has conferred on the fairy mythology by his *Midsummer Night's Dream.*"

In *Lycus the Centaur*, the master who directly inspires Hood is not Spenser, but Keats in his *Lamia*, although the influence of Shelley also betrays itself prominently not only in the metre, but also in the tendency to over-wrought supernatural horrors.† The story takes us back to the dim world

* *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), Vol. II, p. 287.

† The metre of the poem is evidently borrowed from Shelley's *Vision of the Sea.*

of Greek metamorphosis-myths to which *Lamia* belongs, though the Greek spirit which Keats reproduces so superbly is hardly kept up. A certain bizarrerie, in which there is more of Shelley than of Keats, recalling the ' horror-romanticism ' of an earlier period, prompts the description at the beginning of Lycus's strange sensibilities.* The bizarre note is carried on in the description of the horrors of Circe's ' magical dominion,'† where, amidst the horrors, Lycus feels off and on strange emanations of a subtle, sensuous, passionate love, till the source from which they proceed embodies itself in the melting figure of the water-nymph. Hood cannot wield the magic of Keats in the rendering of sensuous beauty, though he evidently strains after it as in his description of the wood-nymph's charms. The disastrous love, which leads to the transformation of Lycus through the effect of Circe's incomplete spell into a hideous centaur, is described with an accumulation of sensuous details which, however, fail to recapture the Keatsian glow and

* " And I pluck'd of the fruit with held breath and fear
That the branch would start back and scream out in my ear,
For once at my suppering, I pluck'd in the dusk
An apple juice-gushing and fragrant of musk;
And by daylight my fingers were crimson'd with gore,
And the half-eaten fragment was flesh at the core;
And once,—only once, for the love of its blush,
I broke a bloom-bough, but there came such a gush
On my hand, that I fainted away in weak fright,
While the leaf-hidden wood-pecker shrieked at the sight."

† *E.g.* demons clustered into one monster ' like the dragon that strangles the moon in the night,' ' fierce sphinxes,' ' long serpents and asps of the south,' ' slime-born abominations,' ' vile shapeless things,' etc.

warmth. The conclusion of the story, reminding the reader of the monster of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein* hungering for love, is touched into profound pathos by the episode of the child's maltreatment of the centaur.

These romantic poems of Hood's have the nature of literary *tour de force*. They are shaped out of different literary influences on his mind and are embellished with imagery culled from different sources. They undoubtedly reflect the mood in which Keats, whom Hood imitated, approached mediaeval legends,—the mood of absorption in their remote trance-like beauty. But the reflection is as though of the moon in still water, pale and watery, with none of the freshness, glory and spell of the real orb.

But in the other group of poems there is more vitality and creative power and the supernaturalism has a stronger and more effective note.

The Dream of Eugene Aram may be regarded as a descendant in line of the *Ancient Mariner*. It reproduces the human interest, the dramatic note, the tone of abnormal psychology of Coleridge's poem, and even some of its external marks like the 'echoed phrases and threefold rhyme.'

Lord Lytton, who based his well-known novel on the career of Eugene Aram, says: "The crime of Eugene Aram does, in fact, belong to those startling paradoxes which the poetry of all countries, specially of our own, has always delighted to contemplate." * It stirred the imagination of at least three

* Lord Lytton's Preface to *Eugene Aram* (1878 Ed., Routledge, p. xi).

famous literary men of the period, Lytton, Hood and Godwin, although the novel contemplated by Godwin was anticipated by Lytton.* But the intriguing paradoxical nature of Aram's crime has really little to do with the fundamental conception of Hood's poem, except to give it some local colour and verisimilitude. The remorse of Aram on which the ballad turns is in fact invented by the poet and not taken from the story itself in which there is no trace of such weakening on the ' learned homicide's ' part. In inventing the remorse, the poet was probably harking back to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*.

The poem, despite its title, is not the transcript of a dream, relating as it does dramatically the actual incidents of the crime under that pretence and disguise. A subtle artistic effect, however, ensues from the dream-setting and it consists in the penetration of a sort of deranged dream-consciousness into a tale of real happenings. As the gruesome circumstances of the murder are recalled by Aram in the form of a dream, the dubiety of dream-phenomena seems to get infused into the tale till it becomes difficult to determine how much of the story represents real incidents and how much the mere workings of a disordered brain. The corpse of a

* Godwin remarked to Lord Lytton after the publication of *Eugene Aram* that " he had always thought the story of Eugene Aram peculiarly adapted for fiction, and that he had more than once entertained the notion of making it the foundation of a novel " (see Preface to *Eugene Aram*, 1840 Ed., p. xi). Lord Lytton himself had originally intended to adapt the story to the stage. The novel was first written in 1831.

murdered man does not actually bleed at the touch of the murderer's hand, and when Aram describes how he touched the lifeless clay and blood gushed out and every clot became a burning spot on his brain, we feel that it is not real experience, but the effect of a well-known superstition on the mind,—the blood being 'the blot upon the brain that will show itself without.' Again, we are tempted to ask whether the mighty wind, sweeping up the leaves of the wood, really left the corpse bare or the excited mind of Aram only envisaged the possibility.

On a smaller scale, the poem reproduces the power of Coleridge in tracing the abnormal workings of a guilty mind (as in the *Ancient Mariner*, it is a mind that believes itself to be guilty), and for sheer penetrative insight into an obsessed, hard-pressed consciousness of blood-guiltiness, nothing in romantic poetry can beat the two stanzas in which the poet describes 'the one besetting horrid hint,' growing into a mighty yearning, a fierce impulse, a stern tyrannic thought to see the dead man in the grave, torturing the criminal all night and forcing him to the hiding-place of the corpse in the forest early next morning. Between the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Ballad of the Reading Gaol*, there is no ballad which grips the imagination with so grim a power.

The *Elm Tree*, as we have remarked elsewhere,* is devoid of all human interest. The sheer concentration of imagination on the inner pulse of life in the depths of a wood seems to render the

* See *supra*, p. 213.

sensuous imagery indistinct and indefinite, shading off confusedly into grotesque, fantastic shapes.

In the presence of a vast, primaeval forest, the sense that comes overwhelmingly over the mind is that of a silent, lurking life within. In one of the verses of the *Rig Veda*, the primitive Indian Rishi invokes the hidden life of the forest and speculates wonderingly on the unutterable mysteries it holds.* Hood invests this latent forest-life not merely with a living sentiency, but also with an exquisite sensitiveness to pain which utters itself in mysterious sighs and moans, all mingling in :

> " A sad and solemn sound,
> That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
> And sometimes underground ! "

Making allowance for the unevenness of execution and a certain obtrusiveness of art, the poem succeeds wonderfully in creating round a central conception a thick enveloping atmosphere of weird fantasy. The poet gives to the poem the sub-title, ' A Dream in the Woods.' But the dream is really a trance-like state of intensely concentrated consciousness, under the stress of which the forest and the woodman working within it seem to be magically transfigured. The trees appear

> " Like Pan's fantastic brood ;
> Or still more foul and hideous forms
> That pagans carve in wood ! "

* *Rig Veda*, 10. 146 (Aranyānī-Sukta). See Ragozin's *Vedic India*, ' Story of the Nations ' series, p. 272.

—So hideously life-like indeed that

" Some whisper from that horrid mouth
Of strange unearthly tone
Or wild infernal laugh, to chill
One's marrow to the bone."

—would have been no marvel to hear. The woodcutter plying his trade in the depths of the forest appears like a terrifying fiend at work. The trees are tortured with the agony of the coming doom, the more intensely and exquisitely felt for want of voice and utterance :

" Like Titans of primaeval girth
By tortures overcome,
Their brown enormous limbs they twine
Bedew'd with tears of gum—
Fierce agonies that ought to yell,
But, like the marble, dumb."

recalling—

" In ramous wrestlings interlaced
A Forest Laocoon."

The grim figure of the woodman is replaced by the grimmer and mightier Phantom of Death, though his high-pitched moralisings strike a somewhat rhetorical note. But the fantasy is well rounded off by the relapse of the forest to its ancient mood. The Wordsworthian idea, so delicately expressed

in the poem on *Nutting* and summed up in the lines :

" .....with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods."

is here pressed by a melodramatic stress of imagination into a thick matted cluster of grotesque and bizarre ideas and images.

The *Haunted House* is conceived in the same tone of weird, awed and haunted imagination. In the former, the hidden life of a forest is sought to be seized and imaginatively rendered ; in this poem, it is the hidden mystery of crime and desolation in a haunted mansion. There is the same vague mind-wandering in this poem also and the device by which the mental wanderings are brought to a rallying point, as it were, is the same in both,—a deeply stressed and heavy refrain which becomes almost unbearably heavy in this poem.

The mystery about the haunted house is studiously kept in the dark,—only a baffling clue is offered to the imagination in the token of the Bloody Hand. But the sense of some weighty crime that Heaven could not pardon suffuses the whole overcharged atmosphere, and the awareness of the crime hangs heavy, almost with a frozen weight, everywhere.

The poem is in fact a ' tale of terror ' out of which the incidents have evaporated leaving only the emotional precipitate. It is the sublimated impression of Walpole-Radcliffean romance, and a clue to the process in which the poet's imagination

works is afforded by the use to which he puts such crude old devices as the animated pictures in the *Castle of Otranto*. Dark figures and faces ' spectre-pallid ' gaze out of the tarnished frames :

" Not merely with the mimic life that lies
Within the compass of Art's simulation;
Their souls were looking thro ' their painted eyes
With awful speculation.
On every lip a speechless horror dwelt;
On ev'ry brow the burthen of affliction;
The old Ancestral Spirits knew and felt
The House's malediction."

Hood lived in an age of melodrama and there is undoubtedly a stress of the melodramatic, a straining after the over-wrought emotional, in the process of his imagination, and it betrays itself not only in intentional treatment, but also in the poems written in a wholly different temper. In his masterpiece of grotesque satire, *Miss Kilmansegg and Her Golden Leg*, a weird turn is given to the death-scene of the heroine where she goes up the stairs with her taper, followed by a double shadow, her own and Death's, and, as she turns in after quenching the taper's light, a Hand of Bone closes mortality's curtain.

Shelley

Shelley's Relation to Supernaturalism :

The poems of Keats and of the minor poets indicate to us a process of assimilation by which in

later romantic poetry the supernatural elements tend to become, whether crudely or finely, elements of the romantic quality itself. Hood achieves out of them the melodramatic or overwrought emotional quality which characterises his more original romantic poems; Keats, having a keener sense of artistic value, produces out of them, as we have seen, finer, subtler and more varied romantic effects. The process of assimilation,—of the merging, as it were, of supernaturalism in romanticism,—seems to culminate in the visionary imagination of Shelley.

Shelley's relation to supernaturalism is a curiously crossed and singular one. We have observed how the course of Keats's imaginative development brought the supernatural into his poetic vision and how the phases of his growing mind left their impress on his treatment of it from *Isabella* to *Lamia*. In Shelley's poetry, however, a similar process of unfoldment can hardly be traced. The growth of Keats's mind lends itself, however imperfectly, to be studied as a process,* and it is possible to fit into it his attractions for the supernatural. But a baffling hiatus seems to intervene between Shelley, the fearful seeker after ghosts 'in listening chamber, cave and ruin, and starlight wood' and Shelley, the prophet of humanity and dreamer of Platonic dreams. Between the former Shelley and the latter, the lines of division seem to run along two kinds of change in outlook and

* See Thorpe's *The Mind of John Keats* (Chs. III and IV), Bradley's *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (on the Letters of Keats), De Selincourt's *Warton Lecture on Keats*, etc.

vision. First, the poetic motives and themes turn from coarse supernaturalism to humanitarian and prophetic passion which seizes upon him first in the conception of *Queen Mab*. Secondly, the quality of imagination evolves from cruder forms of romance to a sublimer beauty,—visionary, unearthly, Platonic, ideal.

For the transformation of his poetic motives and the different turn of his imagination, a spring-morning inspiration is the poet's own excuse. Two occasions on which the inspiration visited him are referred to by the poet himself—in the Dedication of the *Revolt of Islam* (sts. iii and iv), when it drove his yet immature mind to the thought of social iniquities, the tyranny of the strong over the weak, and in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (sts. v and vi), when it revealed to him the ' awful Loveliness ' to which his powers thereafter were dedicated. But the cleavage between his two selves, howevermuch the poet may emphasise it and however prominent it may appear by the external test of poetic expression, is perhaps more apparent than real. For behind the higher poetic self to which the poet professes to have attained on the wind of inspiration, we find yet the urge of that ingrained strain in Shelley, the feeling for the supernatural, of which the cruder manifestation lies in the immature works of his early youth. This feeling and fascination for the supernatural, however, was a twofold one with Shelley.

We have dealt already with the 'horror-strain' in Shelley's poetry. Its relation to his stolen

pseudo-scientific experiments in schoolboy days * forms indeed a curious study in the growth of personality. The poet had early found a literary expression for his boyish fascination for things supernatural in romances and poems of horror. Demonry and necromancy undergo in them what in modern Freudian psychology is called a 'transformed interest.' It is not an art-sense, but a temperamental leaning that leads him blindfold back to a world which was distant already from the ken of the romantic poet's imagination. Poems like *Saint Edmond's Eve*, *Revenge* and *Ghasta* † are steeped in the atmosphere out of which emanated, nearly a decade and a half before Shelley's *Original Poetry*, the poems of horror-romanticism like Southey's *Donica*, *Rudiger* and *Bishop Bruno*. These poems of Shelley's boyhood represent a move back to the world, smelling of 'the reek of the slaughter-yard and the whiff of the charnel-house,' that 'Monk' Lewis once ruled as his demesne. The poet, as we have seen,‡ never wholly lost contact with this atmosphere and this world.

But the supernatural had for him, as it seems, not only the attraction of dread and horror, but allurement also of a far different kind, and the fact recorded by Mrs. Shelley in her note on *Alastor* that *Thalaba* was a favourite poem of his has a

* See Dowden's *Life of Shelley* (Ch. I) for Shelley's 'dallyings with the romantic side of science.'

† In the *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*.

‡ *Supra*, pp. 156-162.

peculiar significance in this connection. A review of Southey's poem will be found in Appendix III to the present work. The poem has no doubt its elements of supernatural terror; but they are purely accessory, while its essential and most outstanding quality, that which stamps it with a special character, lies in its utter remoteness from reality, the strange and baffling out-of-the-earth nature of its epic action. The question may appropriately be raised of the extent of the influence of *Thalaba* on Shelley's poetry, for in the epic action of the *Revolt of Islam*, in the far wanderings and strange experiences of *Alastor*, in the purely visionary landscapes of *Epipsychidion*, the remote and unearthly quality of *Thalaba* seems to reappear mixed with symbolism and ideology. Perhaps the peculiar supernaturalism of *Thalaba* acted as a pointer to his mind: it was a sign-post to realms of poetic vision, transcending the reality and definiteness of this 'Daedal earth.' It was in these realms that he afterwards found symbols and embodiments of the deeper cravings and ultimate realisations of his spirit. Shelley's fantasies, widely different as they seem in imaginative scope and quality from his juvenile works, do not represent, perhaps, any abrupt movement of the poetic spirit unrelated to the initial dealings of his mind and imagination with the mysteries of the supernatural world.

Shelley himself, in two autobiographical passages in *Alastor* and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* respectively, adumbrates a connection between his early supernaturalism and his later

Platonism. He expresses the conviction that, in his blind gropings after the supernatural in boyhood, he was unconsciously moving towards the Reality behind life's ' painted veil,' conceived by him later as Beauty, Beneficence or the plastic Spirit informing all cosmic existence, the high and rapturous sense of which gives wings to the more sublime imaginative flights in Shelley's poetry. In *Alastor*, this Reality is invoked as the ' Mother of this unfathomable world,' and the poet's necromantic experiments of early life are described as frustrated attempts at communion with her :

" .....I have made my bed
In charnels and on coffins, where black death
Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
Thy messenger, to render up the tale
Of what we are ..... "

(ll. 24-30.)

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, a poem steeped in Shelley's Platonism, the Reality that figures in *Alastor* as the ' Mother of this unfathomable world ' is set forth in the Platonic abstraction of ' the shadow of some unseen Power,' ' the Spirit of Beauty ' or the ' awful Loveliness.' Poets and sages have sought to gain access to her penetralia through their crude conceptions of an other world :

" Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost and Heaven
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells—whose uttered charm might not avail
to sever,

From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance and mustability." (st. iii.)

The same 'vain endeavour' had been made by the poet himself before the ecstatic moment of revelation came to him. It had engaged him feverishly in ghost-hunting, necromancy and black magic:

"While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth
is fed." (st. v.)

These passages indicate that to Shelley the preoccupation with the supernatural in his early life was like a dark valley of shadows through which he was struggling towards the heights on which lay the eternal splendour of Reality,—the 'unseen Power,' the 'Spirit of Beauty,' the 'Great Parent' of the world, the 'One' that remains while 'the many change and pass.' In the midst of the struggles, the shadow of the splendour fell upon him with an apocalyptic revelation. Whether this revelation the poet speaks of, was an actual event in his spiritual life will perhaps remain open to sceptical question, but the spiritual evolution of Shelley from supernaturalism to Platonism amounted to a transformation of poetic personality.

And in the transformation of personality lay a transformation of imaginative art. With the growth of his Platonism, the supernatural no longer

interested his imagination for its own sake, but it subserved higher poetic ends. How this change in the mode of his imagination drives the supernatural in his poetry towards the super-terrestrial is illustrated by the *Witch of Atlas*,—a poem based on the same kind of metamorphosis-myth as Keats's *Lamia*.

The Witch of Atlas: its Super-terrestrialism

The initial conception of the 'witch' was picked up by Shelley from a passage in Book IV of the *Aeneid*;* it was developed and extended with an account of the witch's parentage conceived in the gay and elaborate fancifulness caught by Shelley from Homer and rendered perfectly in his version of the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury*.

There were hints enough in the Virgilian passage for the creation of a superb supernatural figure with powers and attributes sublime beyond Nature's range. But Shelley's imagination was not intent on creating the supernatural, and the conception of a daughter of the Atlantides is curiously sublimated to that of a being, not supernatural, but

* "Near the bounds of ocean and the setting sun lies Ethiopia far away; where mighty Atlas on his shoulders wields the heaven, bedecked with brilliant stars; a priestess thence, of the Messylian nation, has been named to me, who kept the temple of the Hesperides, and to the dragon gave his food, and watched the sacred branches on the tree, sprinkling the honey-dew and drowsy poppy. She offers by her charms to free what minds she likes, and bring on others heavy cares: to stop the river's flow, and backward turn the stars: she calls the ghosts by night: you will observe the earth to bellow under foot, and the ash-trees to come down the mountains."—Bryce's *Works of Virgil* (a literal translation), pp. 251-252.

supra-mundane, divinely passionless, but universally compassionate, the living image and embodiment of Shelley's ideal of the potency of Beneficent Loveliness.

When, after flowing through many a luminous shape, she defines herself into a personality in the depth of the mountain-cavern, she is no ' lady-witch ' at all, but an embodied power of Beauty and Beneficence. With the leading symbolism, the Hermaphrodite, created with fire and snow, recalling the animated snow-images in Southey's *Thalaba*,* connects itself as the image of abstract beauty transcending sex. The voyage through cosmic glories and sleeping human souls is an exploit which becomes meaningful at every point, an incident in the visionary Shelleyan world of interblended metaphysics and fantasy. It is interesting to observe what the poet makes of the following suggestion in Virgil's passage : " She offers by her charms to free what minds she likes and bring on others heavy cares." It develops into the elaborate description in the concluding stanzas (lxix-lxxvii), embodying Shelley's revolutionary, humanitarian and socialistic passions, of ' the pranks she played among the cities of mortal men.' Thus the initial supernatural conception enlarges its meshes to catch the skiey Shelleyan sport of imagination which Francis Thompson rapturously describes as that of an Olympian child among the suns and moons and stars.†

* Tenth Book, 13

† See Thompson's essay on Shelley (*Works of Francis Thompson*, Vol. III, prose, p. 18).

The same poet, Shelley's brother in spirit in a later age, says of Shelley that " he stood at the very junction-lines of the visible and the invisible and could shift the points at will."* Yet Shelley was not, like Blake, one unrelated to his age, and perhaps it is no far-fetched speculation to suppose that the gradual familiarity of the romantic spirit with the supernatural world reaches in Shelley the point of innermost and most vital intimacy. The world of Shelley's poetry is in fact one of composite structure and novel decoration, built out of his metaphysical and revolutionary dreams and hung round with ' starry shapes,' ' horned moons ' and ' meteors strange and fair.' But the Daemons, Spirits and other visionary beings of his visionary world belong to an order of imaginative creation, behind which the grosser shapes of the traditional supernatural seem to stand, like the earlier brood of Titans overpeering the mightier and lovelier Olympian hierarchy.

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* *Ibid*, p. 25.

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In the foregoing review and survey of romantic poems dealing with the supernatural in different phases, we have pointed to the traces of an inner process,—one of assimilation, of absorption and of intimacy between the old supernatural motive and the spirit of romanticism in English poetry.

Perhaps the motive itself has a perennial attraction,—not only in the ' poetry of folk,' but in the ' poetry of art ' as well. About a poet's deeper intuitions, there is always something strangely primitive which seems utterly beyond the reach or influence of cultured mental habitude. For this primitive something the supernatural has a constant lure. So in the art and poetry of all nations, it is possible to trace a tradition of supernaturalism, —to follow the subtle craft of that witch, who, in the words of Lowell, ' seats herself at the loom of thought and weaves strange figures into its web '*

Into English romantic poetry, however, the supernatural came, not on a tide of tradition, but rather by a revolt of spirit against a cultured rationalistic outlook on life. The fact serves to explain why between the supernaturalism of poets of the pre-romantic age,—of Collins, Gray, the

* Lowell's *Among my Books* (on Witchcraft), Everyman's Library, p. 116.

Wartons and Burns, who belonged half in spirit to the eighteenth century,—and that of Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge, the traces are so desultory and faint. It is only when English poetry disengages itself completely from the spirit of the 'age of Reason and Common sense' that the supernatural is restored to its due place and importance in the activity of the poet's imagination, —whether it comprehend life in relation to the action and adventure of the mediaeval past or to the 'essential passions' and 'elementary feelings' of the human heart. Between Scott and Coleridge, so widely asunder in their conception as well as treatment of the supernatural, the common link lies in this imaginative recognition of the supernatural as an element in life itself, and not a mere interesting fossil or relic from ancient mythology or mediaeval romance.

There is thus nothing really 'revivalist' in romantic supernaturalism, and it is as fresh and original in Scott's mediaevalistic as in Coleridge's human and psychological treatment. Absorbed in all the freshness of vitality in the conscious romantic spirit, its diverse notes become in English romantic poetry increasingly strong, distinct and intimate, till in the poets of the later generation they seem indeed to ring from the very soul of romantic imagination.

This growing strength and intimacy of the supernatural in romanticism is hardly traceable by external tests, for it is a strain in the inner consciousness. Yet perhaps it is not fantastic to point to a gradation from the poets who take

the supernatural from legends of the past, through those who find it in their romantic conceptions of Man and Nature, to the later romantics with whom it is an urge in the inner vision. The transition from the haunted or enchanted castle of mediaevalistic supernaturalism to Keats's :

> " .....magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

is typical of a process.

From intercourse and intimacy with the supernatural, the gain to romantic poetry was a twofold one—a deepening of its poetic intuitions and a widening of the range of its creative power.

Two profound influences, as we know, came to bear on romantic poetry from the life, art and literature of the past, which are stated by the literary historian in the generalised terms, Hellenism and Mediaevalism. The range of reaction of the former on the English romantic spirit is represented by Wordsworth's longing, prompted by the deep discontent, so fundamental in romantic temper, for a glimpse of Proteus and Triton and admiration for the ancient Greek's natural religion, —Keats's more intimate passion for the ideal beauty in Greek life, art and mythology,—Shelley's recapture of the mythopaeic faculty of the primitive Greek mind. In all these reactions, the romantic mind seems to be quickened and urged by visions of the brighter, clearer and simpler forms of life and thought of the classical past. The

mediaeval world, however, did not come to the romantic poet in this visionary perspective, but in a paramnesia as it were, in a reviviscence of something that was felt to be within. The superstitions and sensibilities, the thrills and terrors, the apprehensions of minds unenfranchised by science, —belonging properly to the world which the rationalistic century had fondly thought of as definitely left behind,—were recalled by the romantics under the name of nature or romance. They served undoubtedly to deepen for the romantic poet life's ' elemental ecstasies.'

At the same time, in the resumption of the supernatural was found the most obvious justification of the ' creativeness ' of the imaginative faculty which came to replace in poetry the 'fancy' and ' judgment ' of the preceding age. As Prof. Garrod rightly remarks : " The regress of the romantics upon the supernatural may properly be conceived as raising the whole problem of the creative character of art and of the meaning of the phrase, ' poetic truth.' " * While theoretically the poetic dealing with supernatural themes made the fundamental differences of romanticism with the previous century more clear and incisive, it gave to romantic imagination a new extension of power. This extended power hardly confines itself within the bounds of the supernatural world. It goes further,—it seeks for the supersensuous, it explores in reality itself the latent mystery and magic of things, it evolves out of Nature's life

* Garrod's *Keats*, p. 135.

'forms more real than living man,' in short it makes of the poet the fine creative being described by the Fourth Spirit, symbolising poetic inspiration, in Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*:

" Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses:
But feeds on the aerial kisses
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.
He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,
Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality! "

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APPENDICES

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2. Ballad Poetry and Romanticism
3. Review of *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama*
4. Coleridge on Supernaturalism

APPENDIX I

Folk-lore and Folk-superstitions in Burns's Poetry

(Referred to at pp. 13, 29 and 67-69)

The poems of Burns which deal humorously with folk-lore and folk-superstitions have a vitality and an interest of their own entitling them to separate consideration. The distinctive quality of Burns's treatment of such themes has already been commented on (pp. 67-69) and the following review is appended by way of illustration only.

Death and Dr. Hornbook—is a most delightfully humorous poem turning on the meeting between a village apothecary and the phantom of Death. The apothecary is drunk and tipsy, and his condition is very happily hit off by his ineffectual efforts to count the horns of the moon :

"The rising moon began to glowre
The distant Cumnock hills out-owre:
To count her horns, wi' a' my pow'r,
I set mysel;
But whether she had three or four,
I cou'dna tell."

In this tipsy, devil-may-care condition, the apparition of Death that appears before him agrees well with his rollicking mood. It is the most novel description in the whole range of English poetry of the phantom of Death which orthodox imagination invests with the conventional properties of terror. Burns's phantom has nothing of the terrible about it,—it is only an odd, rustic, ludicrous figure, very lightly touched with symbolism, with a scythe dangling over one shoulder and a three-tonged spear over the other, its stature two Scotch ells tall, set off with a huge belly and a pair of thin shanks, as sharp and small as ' cheeks o' branks.' After the first shock of 'eerie swither' is over, the apothecary bids good evening to the phantom and engages him in conversation. The contrast between the queer personality, pouring out the entertaining tale of his woes accruing from the medical manoeuvres of Dr. Hornbook, and the solemn manner in which he introduces himself :

> " It spak right howe,—' My name in Death;
> But be na fley'd."

strikes the humorous key-note of the piece.

Address to the De'il—is a poem curiously compounding the widely various mediaeval conceptions of the Devil, half-pagan and half-Christian, which have filtered down, perhaps from more estimable sources, into folk-superstition. From the funny and comic creature whose petty malice is easily worsted, figuring in the Miracle Plays and the legendary (as in the Life of

Dunstan) to the theological arch-enemy of mankind, the Devil in mediaeval legends shifts through various shapes. There is no attempt in this poem, as Prof. Elton has noticed,* for a ' slowly unified intellectual point of view.' The Devil frightens poor travellers on wintry nights, standing in the way like a ' rush-bush with waving sough,' spoils the milk-churning of country-wives and puts mystic knots in the loom-work and does other rustic tricks, and at the same time lurks unseen ' prying in the human bosom ' and boils damned souls in Hell. But this miscellaneous jumble of ideas is exactly calculated to produce that rollicking sense of amusement and incongruity which the poet intends. The exploits of the Devil range through the whole gamut of fun, absurdity and dread, and the satirical undertone is overheard in the poet's solemn address :

" Great is thy pow'r, and great thy fame;"

The peculiar cast of Burns's humour which can convert the sublime into the ridiculous in a moment is nowhere better displayed than in describing the Devil's masterpiece of mischief, the great Temptation, the centre-point of Christian theology :

" Then you, ye auld snick-drawing dog!
Ye cam to Paradise incog.,
An' play'd on man a cursed brogue,
(Black be your fa'!)
An' gied the infant warld a shog,
'Maist ruin'd a'."

* *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), Vol. I, p. 135.

The conclusion of the Address is of consummate fitness. But it is too often misread as a mere sally of wit, or, as Carlyle supposed,* an ebullition of Burns's abounding love and geniality which extends to the Devil himself. But it turns in fact on the idea of mediaeval catholicism that the Devil, the wholly defeated and crushed enemy, who feebly retains his malice without power to execute it, able to frighten but not to injure, is rather an object of pity than of terror to mankind. The idea, though overlaid by the Puritan conception, set forth with epic magnificence in *Paradise Lost*, of Satan's royalty of might and princedom over evil, is caught in popular legends and superstitions, representing the Devil as a poor powerless creature so entirely crushed indeed that 'the soul feareth no more the blustering of the fiend than the stirring of a mouse.' Burns, therefore, dismisses this pitiful creature of many mischievous pranks, called by the familiar names, Hornie, Satan, Nick or Clootie, with a kindly thought and a pious wish that 'he would take thought and mend.'

Halloween—is not, as it appears to be, simply a descriptive catalogue of rustic superstitions.† It is informed throughout with that zest in the merry, quick-paced movement of life, that exhilarating 'joie de vivre' which makes Burns, like Tam o' Shanter in his cups, 'feel glorious.' The note of

* *Heroes and Hero-worship* (on Burns).

† Hazlitt says: "The 'Halloween' is a most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery." (See *Lectures on English Poets and The Spirit of the Age*, Everyman's Library, p. 132.)

joy and merriment is struck at the beginning in describing the occasion of the poem :

" Some merry friendly country-folks
Together did convene,
To burn their nits, an' pou their stocks,
An' haud their Halloween
Fu' blythe that night."

Collins in his *Ode to Fear* invests with terror the ghosts and goblins that come abroad on that ' thrice-hallow'd eve.' But for Burns they have no possibility of overawing fear, for the gloom of their supernatural appearance is completely merged in the brilliant social mirth and jollity of the night. The supernatural is not viewed apart by Burns either as a strange intrusion into life or as an abstraction of fancy or as something starting up with eerie suddenness to overawe men's minds. It is of the stuff of rustic life itself. We may observe how the poet describes the confusion of the village maid Merran who performs the magic rite of stealing out all alone to the kiln and throwing in the dark a clue of blue yarn into the pot, expecting that something will hold the thread and, being accosted, reveal the name of her future spouse. But her courage fails her at the last when she has to accost the unseen holder of the yarn's end :

" An' aye she win't, and aye she swat,
I wat she made nae jaukin,'
Till something held within the pat,
Guid Lord! but she was quakin'!

But whether 'twas the Deil himsel,'
Or whether 'twas a bauken,'
Or whether it was Andrew Bell (*i.e.*, her lover)
She didna wait on talkin '
To spier that night."

The terror is dissolved into the pure fun of the situation. Again, how funnily does the adventure of ' fechtin' Jamie Fleck' end! Jamie Fleck who goes out bravely into the dark, but with secret fear tugging at his heart, ' whistling up Lord Lennox's March to keep his courage cheery,' hears a squeak, then a groan, and staggers as he tries to deliver a vigorous kick, and ' roars a horrid murder-shout '—

" Till, stop! she trotted thro' them a';
An' wha was it but grumphie
Asteer that night!"

In the same way happen many another incident of the night, and the dread of the supernatural melts away in ' merry songs and friendly cracks ' and ' unco tales and funny jokes ' continued all night :

" Till butter'd sow'ns, wi ' fragrant lunt,
Set a' their gabs a-steerin' : "

Tam o' Shanter—is deservedly the most popular and decidedly the best in Burns's peculiar line of light-hearted treatment of the supernatural.

The legend, on which it is based, had two versions, one of Ayrshire and the other of Galloway, with a significant difference in the catastrophe. Burns might have known the Galloway version of the story, the sequel of which, as given by Lockhart, contains lurid elements of terror. Lockhart, whose estimate of supernaturalism in poetry must

have taken colour from Scott's ballads and legendary poems, considers the catastrophe in Burns's poem to be ' unworthy of the preparation,' a fault which in his opinion could have been avoided if Burns had followed the Galloway edition of the legend.* But obviously the lurid-grotesque of fitting the separated bloody hand to the stump of Cutty-sark would have been inconsistent with Burns's manner.

In fact the elements of supernatural terror in the poem, which other poets would have emphasised and dwelt on, seem to be swept clean away by the very rush and rapidity of the narrative. If we compare for a moment the dismal associations of Tam o' Shanter's ride with those of Lenore's spectral lover in Bürger's poem, the difference comes out in clear relief. In Burns's poem, there is nothing of Bürger's laboured evolving of the eerie and gruesome. In the course of the ride, Tam passes several landmarks, each associated with a violent death, but they flash past and do not loom and terrify :

" By this time he was 'cross the foord,
Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Whare drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel."
(ll. 89-96)

* See Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, Everyman's Library, pp. 150-151.

The haunted Alloway Kirk and the 'unco sight' it reveals are gruesome in all conscience. The concomitants of the witches' and warlocks' dance are properly enough calculated to thrill. The light in the interior of the church is produced from four coffins standing round, each with a corpse holding a candle in its cold hand, and this unearthly light, the effect of 'some devilish cantraip sleight,' reveals the horrors heaped on the holy table—a murderer's bones in gibbet irons; small, two-span long unchristened children; a thief new-cut from the hanging rope, gasping with his last breath; five tomahawks red-rusted with blood and five scimitars 'with murder crusted'; a garter which has strangled a babe; the knife of a parricide 'with gray hairs yet stuck to the heft.' These horrors, however, have become so conventionally associated with witchcraft since Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that they have almost ceased to horrify. But witchcraft would be incomplete without them.

These conventional horrors, if we may so call them, quickly give place, however, to our interest in their reaction on Tam o' Shanter's mind. He has taken inspiration from 'bold John Barleycorn,' and so, instead of fleeing, he continues to witness the scene with amazement and curiosity till he distinguishes the 'winsome wench and walie' in Cutty-sark, and in the ecstasy of drunkenness breaks out into a cheer. The narrative quickly gets into stride and movement again and the pursuit promptly begins and soon ends on the keystone of the bridge where Maggie the mare has to leave her gray tail in the witch's hand. Beyond this

point, the story cannot go, as, however, it does in the Galloway version of the legend, without destroying the effect intended by the poet.

Tam o' Shanter is the most completely successful, as it is perhaps the most perfectly concerted, of Burns's poems. Its main charm is derived from that prevailing quality of Burns's poetry which has been so happily hit off by a critic of eminence of our day that it would be difficult to improve on his expression: "Everything is seen in movement.....Things flash by, or the wind sweeps the voices along. The pace of excited actual existence, jovial or angry or rueful, is given by Burns as by few other poets."* Only it has to be added that the supernatural throws a passing gleam of light athwart this excited hurry of life, and, in the poems reviewed above, invests it with a fascination in which it becomes delicately difficult to distinguish between the earthly interest and the unearthly.

The concentration on the unearthly, by which supernatural terror is usually distilled, is decidedly not in Burns's manner. It is perhaps hardly fair to compare so spontaneous a poem as Burns's *Tam o' Shanter* with a work of slow and deliberate art, fetching a larger scope and producing a deeper complexity, like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. But it may be noted how frequently the narrative in Coleridge's poem eddies into thought, going round and round a supernatural incident, while Burns's

* Elton : *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), Vol. I, p. 104.

runs straight on like a sweeping current. With the hero of Coleridge's poem, life has slowed down in the illimitable solitude and waste of the distant seas, but with Tam, the pace of life is stimulated and quickened by the exhilaration of drink. The psychological truth is palpable in the art of each poem. In solitude the mind is apt to turn inwards upon itself, ruminating on its experiences, while in the current of life, it turns outwards and seizes on the immediate and the tangible. The supernatural, as perceived by the mind in these different circumstances, must appear differently, vague and uncertain in the former and more definite and clear in the latter. Hence, in Burns's poem, the supernatural elements have all the striking concreteness of unmistakable realities and none of Coleridge's ' the upper air burst into life ' kind of effect. With Burns, the supernatural does not appear in solitude : it comes with the rush and zest of crowded experience, to which the spirit of Barleycorn adds a noticeable piquancy.

APPENDIX II

Ballad Poetry and Romanticism

(Referred to at pp. 75 ff.)

The wide difference in spirit, temper and motivation between old balladry and romanticism is a discovery of late criticism. Percy, Scott and others had indeed emphasised the historical background of popular ballads, but the study of their wider sociological background was of later growth. The result of this study has been to bring into clearer relief the essentially ' primitive ' character of the popular ballad.

With the idea of this ' primitiveness ' fixed in our mind, the art and poetry of the old ballad appear to us to be the very antithesis of the romantic. With its refrain, its incremental repetitions, its conventional epithets and recurring commonplaces, it seems to aim at the evocation not of a romantic mood, but a ' collective emotion.' Its motivation is clearly outside the artistic temper. " With the remote beat of foot in the ballad," as Prof. Gummere remarks, " is heard louder and nearer the voice of those who sing it." * The staple of its art, deriving from its choral origin, consists in the conventional and familiar, in fact in all that seeks and finds a common and immediate response from an unsophisticated audience. It is thus the polar opposite of the romantic art,—of its observant, ruminant spirit, deliberately exploring the particular, the less obvious, the unfamiliar and strange.

* *The Popular Ballad*, p. 336.

But this incompatibility was not apparent to the early romantic poets, as they did not approach ballad poetry in the temper and spirit of modern sociological sciences. There are obvious strains of feeling and sensibility in the old ballads which conveyed to them a sense of the affinity of ballad poetry to romanticism, and Wordsworth's claim for Percy's *Reliques* that English poetry has been 'absolutely redeemed' by that work (see *supra*, p. 75) is intelligible only when we consider the fresh appeal of these strains to him and his contemporaries :

1. The sense of far-off things or, what Prof. Abercrombie calls, 'the feeling of distance in a view,' * which rounds off with such an exquisitely romantic effect Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* :

"And they are gone: ay, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm;"

is present in many an old Border ballad. In *Lord Maxwell's Goodnight*, the knight leaves the festive board of the farewell meeting, and the ballad concludes thus :

"Sae now he's o'er the floods sae gray,
And lord Maxwell has ta'en his Goodnight."

In *Johnie o' Breadislee*, the intrepid Border outlaw passes at last into the dim distance of memory :

"Now Johnie's guide bend bow is broke,
And his gude graie dogs are slain;
And his bodie lies dead in Durrisdeer,
And his hunting it is dune."

* *Romanticism* (Martin Seeker, 1925).

The loyal adventurous sailor Sir Patrick Spens lies, ' with the Scots lords at his feet,' forty miles off Aberdeen and fifty fathoms deep.

2. The sense of ' old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago ' breathes through the closing stanzas of *The Battle of Bothwell Brig* and *The Battle of Otterbourne*, e.g.,

" Alang the brae, beyond the brig,
Mony brave man lies cauld and still;
But lang we'll mind, and sair we'll rue,
The bloody battle of Bothwell Hill."

And :

" This deed was done at Otterbourne
About the breaking of the day;
Earl Douglas was buried at the braken bush,
And the Percy led captive away."

(Taken from Scott's version in the *Minstrelsy*)

3. The poignant realisation of evil in human life and destiny, of ' what man has made of man ' and of ' hungry generations treading each other down,' is most frequently behind the motives of ballad poetry. The victims of jealousy and cruelty, the jilted lover or the forsaken maid, the dead urged out of the grave by the disquietude of unfulfilled passion, figure in it almost everywhere. Stories of tragic ending to brave intentions, of supernatural agencies that inveigle men into dire calamity, ' the tragedy of kin,' are its staple incidents. Most of these ballad motives,—of kinship, of love, of revenge, etc.,—seem systematically to

explore the tragic in human life, evoking that sense of ' lachrymae rerum,' the old Roman poet speaks of, which develops in romantic poetry into what Prof. Babbitt has phrased ' romantic melancholy.'*

4. The strain of emotional longing, so characteristic of romantic poetry, is also found in several ballads. As Lady Isabel sits in her bower, sewing on a May morning when ' the gowans grow gay,' the horn of the elf-knight comes floating to her ears and the love-yearning flutters her heart :

" If I had that horn that I hear blawing,
And yon elf-knight to sleep in my bosom : "
(*Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight*)

Lady Margaret sits at her bower-door sewing, as ladies in the ballads are wont to do, ' at her silken seam,' when a note coming from Elmond's wood seems to invite her far away, and :

" She loot the seam fa frae her side,
And the needle to her toe,
And she is on to Elmond's wood :
As fast as she coud gae."
(*Hind Etin*)

5. In several passages of ballad poetry, the descriptions, though somewhat conventionally conceived, carry yet the hint of a Keatsian quality which in the hands of the later Pre-Raphaelite poets became such an exquisitely delicate and

* *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Ch. IX.

sensitive art. We find it in the colourful refrain of *Tam Lin*:

"Janet has kilted her green kirtie
A little aboon her knee,
And she has broded her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree;"

and also in the description of Margaret's toilette in *Fair Margaret and Sweet William*:

"Fair Margaret sat in her bower-window,
Acombing of her hair,
And there she spy'd Sweet William and his bride,
As they were riding near.
Down she layd her ivory comb,
And up she bound her hair;"

or in the description of the dainty little body of the drowned girl in the *Twa Sisters* or of the Faery Queen in *Thomas Rhymer*.

6. The lurid fitful glimpses of the other world in the ghost-ballads, of its constrained loneliness, its unknown mysteries, its baffled passions and yearnings, must have had its lure to the romantic imagination, and we have seen how the note of ghostly passion in the ballad of *Sweet William's Ghost* is expanded into the 'ghostly undersong' in Keats's *Isabella* (see *supra*, p. 310).

APPENDIX III

Review of Thalaba and the Curse of Kehama

(Referred to at pp. 118 ff.)

Southey's *Thalaba* and the *Curse of Kehama* are attempts, as has been already noticed (pp. 118-120), at the reproduction of the effects of romantic narrative poetry outside the orbit of the mediaevalistic tradition. The first poem has a nominal, indefinite and indistinct geographical relation to Arabia and the second to India. They profess to deal with Arabian demonology and Indian mythology respectively. But in spite of their poetic merits and the power of imagination displayed in them, the poems were failures in their time and are seldom studied now. A review of them, while revealing the causes of their failure, shows conclusively at the same time, the secret of the abounding strength and success of Scott's romantic narratives based on revived historical tradition.

Thalaba—The poem treats in quasi-epic style of the adventures of the Arabian hero, Thalaba, against the machinations and sorceries of the evil magicians of Domdaniel and his final victory over them.

The story moves in a strange, incomprehensible world constituted of magic and sorcery, so entirely removed from all contact with human reality

that the imaginative impression produced by the poem is curiously baffling. But against the strange background of a world void of humanity, the pathetic episode of Laila stands out with a poignantly human appeal. What may be called the supernatural make-up of the poem is of a loose and capricious character,—mythology, witchcraft, primaeval legends, stories of marvellous journeys and 'wonder voyages,' all being promiscuously compounded together.

The effect of this unwelded mixture of diverse supernatural elements, of different orders and categories, is to produce a sense of incongruity and to throw out of focus the total impression, so much indeed that, after going through the poem, the mind retains only a few outstanding passages, like the splendid description of Bogdad and the ruins of Babylon,* the supernatural experiences of Thalaba and Moath among the tombs,† the moving episode of Laila ‡ and the awful image of Eblis in Domdaniel.§ Apart from these 'purple patches,' the impression resolves itself into a confused blur of colours,—of the glare of desert sands, the red light of magic flames, the gloom of caverns, the gleam of marble and gems, the blank white of ice-bound regions and the dim silhouettes of towers, battlements and spires in the far distance. Except for the formal and automatic interest in the hero's fate, which, however, fails to move much

* Fifth Book, 6-10.
† Eighth Book, 8-14.
‡ Tenth Book and fol.
§ Twelfth Book, 27.

imaginative sympathy, there is hardly any guiding thread of real imaginative interest in the poem. So the reader goes on echoing in his own mind constantly the feeling of the hero himself on escaping from a sorceress's den :

> " Everywhere magic! the Arabian's heart
> Yearn'd after human intercourse."
>
> (Tenth Book, 8)

When Thalaba's yearning is fulfilled in the all too brief companionship of Laila, the reader also experiences a sense of much needed rest and relief from the overcharged atmosphere of inhuman magic.

Laila is a lonely enchanting figure touched with a patient grace and beauty and pathos. She happens to be the daughter of the magician Okba, who had slain Thalaba's father Hodei and against whom Thalaba had vowed vengeance. She is kept confined in a cave in a region of ice and snow, and her spell-bound life, as described by her, is a strange and sad one :

> " .....my Father
> Made me. He made this dwelling, and the grove,
> And yonder fountain-fire; and every morn
> He visits me, and takes the snow, and moulds
> Women and men, like thee! and breathes into them
> Motion, and life, and sense,.....but, to the touch
> They are chilling cold; and ever when night closes
> They melt away again, and leave me here
> Alone and sad....."
>
> (Tenth Book, 13)

In Thalaba, she finds the longed-for warmth of human companionship, but the enjoyment of it is brief, for obedient to the decree of fate, she has to lay down her life, taking the fatal dagger-blow aimed at Thalaba by her father. But the soul of the pure maiden takes the form of a lovely green bird and guides her heroic lover to the Bird of Ages from whom he learns the way to the Domdaniel caverns ' under the roots of the ocean.' At the journey's end, the bird-maiden flies up to Paradise, but not before she has pleaded for her wicked father at whose hand she received her death.* The figure of Laila, the pure, gentle, self-immolating maiden, seems to concentrate and embody all the human interest that there is in the story.

We have already touched upon the incongruous mixture of supernatural elements in the poem. Taken singly, some of the supernatural scenes and situations produce striking effects. The scene in the Domdaniel caverns, where the ' Masters of the spell ' assemble to discover by means of ' co-existent flames ' the fate of Hodeirah's line, is drawn with powerful realism and is invested with all the luridness of dreadful murderous sorcery.† The supernatural experiences of Thalaba and Moath among the tombs, attended with the horrors of midnight and storm,‡ convey a powerful thrill of terror without the aid of the gross and loathsome associations which German ' horror-romanticism ', deliberately mixed up with it. Again, the winning

* Eleventh Book, 26.
† Second Book, 1-14.
‡ Eighth Book, 9.

of Hodeirah's sword by Thalaba in Domdaniel, 'when the co-existent Flame knew the Destroyer' and made an aureole of glory round his head,* is an epic incident that impresses the imagination powerfully. But there is throughout the poem such an overcrowding of supernatural scenes and incidents of all diverse kinds,—automatic magic alternating with elaborately performed sorcery, miracles wrought by Omnipotent Will followed by marvels brought about by wizardly art, sorcerers and craftsmen of magic moving among the creatures of mythology,—that single effects are merged and lost in the bewildering multiplicity. Azrael, the Angel of Death, appears in several scenes in solemn silence to receive the souls of the dead, but hardly any imaginative effect is produced by the angelic appearance in the given circumstances.

The supernatural 'epic action' also suffers from the want of a concrete geographical or cosmographical scheme, the vital importance of which in epic poetry is illustrated by the conduct of the epic action in *Paradise Lost*. The unrealities of the poem move through a vague and indefinite region, extending wide like a *terra incognita* between the Arabian desert and the lands of ice and snow, situated over a subterranean world that lies 'at the roots of ocean,' with mysterious channels of traffic between the upper and the nether worlds. Hence the action gains no epic consistency and seems to drift at will from one point of the *terra incognita* to another, though tending towards the

* Twelfth Book, 23.

final destination, which is fixed from the beginning, at Domdaniel.

The lover of poetry, having once gone through the twelve books of *Thalaba*, will never think of resuming the arduous journey. The pulse of creative power and energy seems to be stricken with a strange palsy in the work. The consonant vibrations of mind and heart, which constitute the most exquisite part of the aesthetic experience provided by a truly great poem, are raised only slightly, if at all. We seem to be moving from chamber to chamber of a vast museum where wonderful things are stored, not in the moving and breathing freshness of life, but in the still condition of death.

The Curse of Kehama—The epic action of this poem is produced by a sort of poetic dovetailing of two ideas derived by the poet from two widely separated sources. In Kehama, the oppressor of gods and men, is embodied the Hindu idea of the irresistible and omnipotent power of sacrifice and penance (*tapas*), glorified in certain passages of the Vedas; in Ladurlad, the victim of Kehama's wrath, is incorporated the wholly different and non-Hindu idea of eternal life bestowed as punishment which hails from the voluminous mediaeval legends of the Wandering Jew.

The same promiscuous mixture of mythology, folk-lore and western witchcraft that we have noticed in *Thalaba* occurs in this poem also. The supernatural scenes and incidents too have the same bewildering diversity. But the poem has a more

definite and concrete scheme of geography and cosmography which gives much greater firmness and consistency to the epic action. On the whole, it is better planned and more effectively executed than the earlier poem, and the moral purpose, brought to a point in the catastrophe in which Amreeta, the elixir of eternal life, has contrary effects on the wicked tyrant Kehama and the long-suffering virtuous maid Kailyal, lends a certain artistic unity to the action.

Hindu mythology does not really form the imaginative basis of the poem, but supplies only a sort of oriental-romantic machinery by which the poet manages to introduce supernatural scenes, situations and characters. The cosmography with its polar boundaries is at variance with the Hindu Puranic cosmography, and the epic action is not Indian in character or conception. In the factitious oriental supernaturalism of the poem, we have in fact a curious breaking up and mixing together of materials from three successive and distinct strata of Hindu mythology and culture, represented respectively by (*i*) the primaeval myths of gods belonging to the Aryan cult like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra and others, (*ii*) the Puranic legends of Baly, of Horse-sacrifice, of Gandharvas ('Glendovers') carrying away human beings to their upper abodes, and (*iii*) the quaint and uncouth ritualism of minor cults, partly non-Aryan and partly animistic or superstitious in origin, like those of Jagannath and ' the popular deity Marriataly.' The further mixing up with these unmatchable materials of western witchcraft in the person of the

witch Lorrinite, with whom the wicked prince Arvalon is in league in death as well as in life, makes the confusion worse confounded. The incongruity in action that results from it is well exemplified by the episode of the rape of Kailyal, carried away miraculously by 'Joguees' from her retreat on Mount Meru to become the spouse of God Jagannath in the temple at Puri (xiii, 16). The incongruity to the Hindu mind is as though an Olympian goddess of Hera's train should be brought down from Olympus to be transformed into a nun ministering sacred rites at a mediaeval cathedral. The incident of 'Joguees' (roving ascetics), wandering in the Himalayas in search of a bride for the rites of a far-off South Indian god, reaches the very limit of absurdity to the mind of a Hindu reader, for such ascetics have no contact whatsoever with the temple ritualism of Southern India. But it is likely that the hitch arising from this confusion to the aesthetic appreciation of the poem is experienced only by the Indian reader conversant with the nature and contents of his country's mythology. Yet the general lack of unity of impression from the supernatural parts of the poem is all too evident.

The poet's real purpose seems to have been to make Indian mythology and fable yield settings for scenes and characters designed for an epical plot. From this point of view, the poet partially achieves success. The magic palace of Casyapa, built by the blending of the 'hostile essences' of different elements, is a piece of fine imagining.* The birth

* See vii, 10.

of the holy river Ganges is described in a passage of striking beauty and sublimity, beginning with a reference to the sublime Puranic legend about it.* Nor can we omit mention of the note of calm and sad solemnity of the opening passage :

" Midnight, and yet no eye
Through all the Imperial City closed in sleep!"

—which introduces the funeral march and the cremation rites of prince Arvalon. But with the effect of such passages, the romance of oriental setting or the supernatural action has little to do.

One glaring defect of the supernaturalism of the poem arises from Southey's ineptitude in the management of ghosts which seems to have struck Coleridge too.† Arvalon, the wicked son of Kehama, is slain by Ladurlad as he attempts to ravish his lovely daughter Kailyal. But his ghost lives on, bent on revenge and sensual gratification, and makes altogether six appearances,—not 'brief, rare, indistinct,' as Scott opined supernatural appearances should be,‡—in the course of the narrative. When he first appears to Kehama at his own funeral rites (Book II), he is invisible and inaudible to others. But he comes not as a hallu-

* See x, 2.

† "...the *presence* of a ghost is the terror, not what he *does*, a principle which Southey, too, overlooks in his 'Thalaba' and 'Kehama'."—*Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by H. Coleridge, pp. 683-684.

‡ See Scott's essay on 'The Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,'—a criticism of three of Hoffman's stories published in the Foreign Quarterly Review, July, 1927.

cination, but a real revengeful ghost of the well-known Senecan type, urging his father to vengeance on Ladurlad and Kailyal. His next appearance is in the form of a terrifying spectre :

" A human form in that black night,
Distinctly shaped by its own lurid light,
Such light as the sickly moon is seen to shed,
Through spell-raised fogs, a bloody baleful red."
(Bk. ix, 9)

The spectre glares on Kailyal and tries to seize her before the altar of the elephant god, Pollear, but is hurled over the forest by the angry deity (v, 12-15). His next appearance is in the form of a fiend, the only visible part of his body being the face :

" .....amid the clear blue sky,
With long-drawn lips of insolent mockery,
And eyes whose lurid glare
Was like a sulphur fire,
Mingling with darkness ere its flames expire."
(*Ibid*)

The fiend torments Ladurlad by catching and condensing a sunbeam upon him and raising a storm of fire which devastates Ladurlad's home. When he appears next to the witch Lorrinite (xi, 7), he is a fully corporeal being, and he equips himself with the demon-forged helmet and mail, shield and scimitar supplied by the witch, drives after his escaping victims in a chariot drawn by a pair of dragons

and is stopped on an ice-drift amidst the eternal snows. There he lies frozen to the ice-rock :

" Only the painful sense of Being left,
A Spirit who must feel, and cannot die,
Bleaching and bare beneath the polar sky."
(Bk. xi, 17)

His next appearance is in the temple of Jagannath, where he incarnates himself in the person of the lascivious Brahmin priest and attempts to ravish Kailyal with the aid of the witch, but is scorched with flames lit by the defenceless maid and flies away howling (xiv, 13-15). Finally he interposes himself between Kailyal and Glendover, taking a bodily shape :

" .....his loathsome face
Came forth, and from the air,
In fleshly form, he burst."
(Bk. xvii, 9)

but is frustrated in the attempt to ravish the maid by Baly, the king of the underworld, who sends him down like a plummet to the world below :

" To punishment deserved and endless woe."
(Bk. xvii, 163)

These exploits of Arvalon immediately strike the reader as mutually irreconcilable. His ghost is grotesquely led through different incongruous transformations,—becomes successively a malignant spirit, a tormenting fiend of hell, a live human

villain seeking the aid of witchcraft in pursuit of his victims, a demon incarnating himself in another man's body, a re-animated and re-incarnated ghost. Popular superstition, mythology, occultism, theology, witchcraft are all jumbled together, and creatures drawn from different orders of the supernatural world are crudely rolled into one. Besides, in these inconsistent ghostly transformations, no attempt is made to infuse the spirit of oriental supernaturalism from which some of the conceptions are entirely alien.

In the presentation of the mere forms of supernaturalism, unvitalised by a living sense of the supernatural, lies the outstanding artistic defect of Southey's treatment alike of Arabian demonology and of Indian mythology. The mere introduction of a figure or incident from the supernatural world of mythology or folk-lore into modern poetry can carry little aesthetic value or significance unless it is infused with the feeling of its essential wonder or mystery. This feeling is not to be raised by a barely objective or intellectual presentment without the emotional atmosphere, and the supernatural, trenchantly exhibited in the form of marvels or miracles, cannot of itself awaken those intuitive activities of the mind for which a more subtle artistic dealing, capable of evoking associative responses, is necessary. But these subtler effects, so essential to poetic art specially when dealing epically with the supernatural in relation to external life and action, are bound up closely with mental reflexes created by literary or social tradition.

The suggestive and associative power of a mediaeval castle or cathedral to a western mind, in touch through hereditary tradition with the culture and life it represents, does not inhere in an Indian temple or palace. The latter has to be invested with this power by art before it can evoke similar emotional response which, in its nature, is something associative and not fundamental or absolute like our feeling of wonder at something strange or sublime or our sense of delight in beauty. The profound and complex difficulty of this art was neither fully realised nor even confronted by the romantic poets. In fact the art of making the life and beauty of the orient appeal in the same imaginative fashion to aesthetic sensibility as the life of the European Middle Ages did to the earlier generation of romantics is one of post-romantic growth. But it has by now a record of achievement reaching down to the oriental poetry of Flecker who, by virtue of style and treatment, belongs really to the anti-romantic school of the French Parnassians.

APPENDIX IV

Coleridge on Supernaturalism

(Referred to at p. 191)

One of Coleridge's many unfulfilled literary intentions was a systematic critical treatment of supernaturalism in poetry. The intention is first expressed in a letter to Poole, dated March, 16, 1801 : "I shall therefore, as I said, immediately publish my 'Christabel,' with two essays annexed to it on the ' Preternatural ' and on 'Metre.' "* A modified re-statement of the intention occurs in the following passage near the conclusion of Ch. XIII of *Biographia Literaria* : " Whatever more than this, I shall think it fit to declare concerning the powers and privileges of the imagination in the present work, will be found in the critical essay on the uses of the Supernatural in poetry, and the principles that regulate its introduction : which the reader will find prefixed to the poem of *The Ancient Mariner.*"† In the 'Syllabus of the Course ' included in the prospectus of Coleridge's lectures delivered during January—March, 1818, the following is set down as the title of the 11th Lecture : " XI. March 3—On the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, and on the romantic use of the Supernatural in poetry, and in

* *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by H. Coleridge, p. 349.

† *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by Shawcross, Vol. I, p. 202.

works of fiction not poetical. On the conditions and regulations under which such books may be employed advantageously in the earlier periods of education.'' Coleridge's practice of adhering loosely to or widely digressing or even wholly departing from the announced subjects of his lectures is well known. In the extant notes of this lecture, nothing is to be found on 'the romantic use of the Supernatural in poetry.'*

In default of the poet's own systematic treatment, it is open to us to attempt only the second best, *viz.*, to bring together such passages from his notes, letters and lectures as have any bearing on the subject of supernaturalism and to trace in them, so far as possible, the unifying or connecting ideas. The main difficulty of such an attempt arises from the telescopic manner in which Coleridge's ideas in such passages are presented. A summary based on an analytical examination of them is given below.

Thoughts and images have an inherent and independent power which they can exert upon the mind without directing it to the realities for which they stand (passages A and B). But to allow thoughts and images to exert this power fully, the mind must remain in a certain condition. The mind actually turns to this condition in dreams. The will remains in abeyance and the mind cannot perform its volitional activities, *e.g.*, comparing, judging, etc. (A, F, and G). Belief or disbelief

* See *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures*, Everyman's Library, pp. 191-201.

is the result of such volitional mental activities, and hence in the state of mind in dreams, belief or disbelief has no place. The images presented to it in dream are accepted at their face value as it were,—whether they are real or unreal is not at all determined (F).

By the power of art, it is possible to induce an analogous state of mind in which we may be made to imagine things without trying to determine the reality or otherwise of what we imagine. The mind is involved in an illusion as it were (B). But the tension which it implies is possible only to a mind which has reached a certain stage of development. The words of Bertrand Russell may be usefully quoted in this connection : " The absence of belief that accompanies imagination is a somewhat sophisticated product ; it fails in sleep and in strong emotional excitement. Children invent terrors for fun, and then begin to believe in them. The state of entertaining an idea without believing it is one involving some tension, which demands a certain level of intellectual development."* This is assumed by Coleridge when he says that in order to enjoy a ghost-story one must rise superior to the fear of a ghost (D).

The state of mind in which things are imagined without being compared or judged,—of which the dream-state is the type,—is a state of " illusion," " negative faith," " poetic faith " or " suspension of disbelief " (' willing ' in this case, as it is ' unwilling ' in the dream-state). It is most commonly

* *An Outline of Philosophy*, p. 201.

induced at a stage-performance where we are in the presence of scenes with appropriate action going on. But even apart from scenic properties or visible action, this state of mind is capable of being induced. A proof of it lies in the fact that we are moved by a feeling of beauty when we observe idealised forms and figures produced by plastic art. although there may be no correspondent realities to them (C).

The idea of 'stage illusion' probably gave Coleridge the clue to a new mode of supernaturalism. In a modern poem dealing with the supernatural, the poet seeks to communicate ideas and images to minds that do not believe in realities correspondent to them, and hence for the acceptance of the supernatural by such minds, it becomes necessary to put them in a state which is analogous to 'stage illusion.' The analogue is to be found in 'dramatic probability,' which implies not only truth to life, but also the propriety of imaginative setting, the exclusion of ideas which, by pointing to realities. invite comparison and expose the unreality of the supernatural, and in short, what Coleridge calls 'harmony' (D). What stage illusion is to the partly sensible and partly mental experience of an audience in a theatre, dramatic probability is to the purely mental experience (which, however, is possible only to a mind superior to superstitious fears) provided by a supernatural poem. 'Dramatic probability' and 'suspension of disbelief' thus come to be mutually related. Even a sceptic like Hume will 'believe,' that is, feel no intellectual aversion to, a ghost like that of Hamlet's father,

because it is raised in the most perfect dramatic manner (E).

All these passages, on which the summary given above is based, are packed between 1816 and 1818. But there are two grounds on which we might safely hold that these ideas had existed,—perhaps not in logical or developed connection, but in an intuitive fashion,—in Coleridge's mind at the time of the composition of the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. First, we have Coleridge's own testimony that, at the time the *Lyrical Ballads* was planned, the joint authors had already arrived at the principles of ' dramatic truth ' and ' suspension of disbelief ' which were to inform the class of poems falling to Coleridge's share. But here again, in the absence of any hint in the ' Fenwick note ' to *We are Seven* where the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads* is referred to by Wordsworth, though very long afterwards and in the poet's old age, we cannot be absolutely sure that what Coleridge states as 'the idea in which originated the *Lyrical Ballads* ' was not an after-thought. Secondly, passages C and D occur in the *Biographia Literaria* in connection with Coleridge's appreciative review of the character of Don Juan in the old Spanish play of *Atheista Fulminato* of which there were English versions. Coleridge in the context tries to show the dramatic naturalness of this character as against the unnaturalness of similar characters presented in contemporary German drama and its English counterparts. With the latter character-types, Coleridge was concerned in the year, 1797, when he was working on his drama, *Osorio*, and also reviewing *The*

Monk, The Italian, Hubert de Sevrac and similar other works for the *Critical Review*.* Before the composition of the *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*, the question might have occurred to his mind why such characters struck the mind as unnatural and how they could be more effectively presented.

Collectanea

A.—" It is among the feeblenesses of our nature, that we are often, to a certain degree, acted on by stories, gravely asserted, of which we yet do most religiously disbelieve every syllable, nay, which perhaps we know to be false. The truth is that images and thoughts possess a power in, and of themselves, independent of that act of the judgment or understanding by which we affirm or deny the existence of a reality correspondent to them. Such is the ordinary state of the mind in dreams. It is not strictly accurate to say that we believe our dreams to be actual while we are dreaming. We neither believe it, nor disbelieve it. With the will the comparing power, any act of judgment, whether affirmation or denial, is absent. The forms and thoughts act merely by their own inherent power, and the strong feelings at times apparently connected with them are, in point of fact, bodily sensations which are the causes or occasions of the images; not (as when we are awake) the effects of them. Add to this a voluntary lending of the will to this suspension of one of its own operations (that is, that of comparison and consequent decision con-

* See Footnote at p. 168 *supra*.

cerning the reality of any sensuous impression) and you have the true theory of stage illusion, equally distinct from the absurd notion of the French critics, who ground their principles on the presumption of an absolute delusion, and of Dr. Johnson who would persuade us that our judgments are as broad awake during the most masterly representation of the deepest scenes of Othello, as a philosopher would be during the exhibition of a magic lanthorn with Punch and Joan and Pull Devil, Pull Baker, etc., on its painted slides."

—*Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. by H. Coleridge, p. 663.

B.—" That *illusion*, contra-distinguished from *delusion*, that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment, is rendered impossible by their immediate neighbourhood to words and facts of known and absolute truth. A faith, which transcends even historic belief, must absolutely *put out* this mere poetic Analogon of Faith, as the summer sun is said to extinguish our household fires, when it shines full upon them. What would otherwise have been yielded to as pleasing fiction, is repelled as revolting falsehood. The effect produced in this latter case by the solemn belief of the reader is in a less degree brought about in the instances, to which I have been objecting, by the baffled attempts of the author to *make* him believe."

—*Biographia Literaria*, ed. by Shawcross, Vol. II, p. 107.

C.—"*Don Juan* is, from beginning to end, an *intelligible* character: as much so as the *Satan* of Milton. The poet asks only of the reader, what, as a poet, he is privileged to ask: namely, that sort of negative faith in the existence of such a being, which we willingly give to productions *professedly ideal*, and a disposition to the same state of feeling, as that with which we contemplate the *idealized* figures of Apollo Belvedere, and the Farnese Hercules. What the Hercules is to the *eye* in *corporeal* strength, *Don Juan* is to the *mind* in strength of *character*."

—*Ibid*, pp. 186-187.

D.—"But again; of all intellectual power, that of superiority to the fear of the invisible world is the most dazzling. Its influence is abundantly proved by the one circumstance that it can bribe us into a voluntary submission of our better knowledge, into suspension of all our judgment derived from constant experience, and enable us to peruse with the liveliest interest the wildest tales of ghosts, wizards, genii, and secret talismans. On this propensity, so deeply rooted in our nature, a specific *dramatic* probability may be raised by a true poet, if the whole of his work be in harmony: a *dramatic* probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dress; and this too with our eyes

open, and with our judgment *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only not to *dis*believe. And in such a state of mind, who but must be impressed with the cool intrepidity of *Don Juan* on the appearance of his father's ghost."

—*Ibid*, p. 189.

E.—" O heaven! words are wasted on those who feel, and to those who do not feel the exquisite judgment of Shakespeare in this scene (in *Hamlet*, Act I, Sc. i). What can be said?—Hume himself could not but have had faith in this Ghost dramatically, let his anti-ghostism have been as strong as Samson against other ghosts less powerfully raised."

—*Coleridge's Essays and Lectures* (Everyman's Library), p. 141.

F.—" In ordinary dreams we do not judge the objects to be real;—we simply do not determine that they are unreal."

—*Ibid*, p. 302.

G.—" To return, however, to dreams. I not only believe, for the reasons given, but have more than once actually experienced that the most fear-

ful forms, when produced simply by association, instead of causing fear, operate no other effect than the same would do if they had passed through my mind as thoughts, while I was composing a faery tale; the whole depending on the wise and gracious law in our nature, that the actual bodily sensations, called forth according to the law of associations by thoughts and images of the mind, never greatly transcend the limits of pleasurable feeling in a tolerably healthy frame, unless when an act of the judgment supervenes and interprets them as purporting instant danger to ourselves."

—*Ibid*, pp. 305-306.

H.—"The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in *this* sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency... ....

In this idea originated the plan of the 'Lyrical Ballads'; in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human

interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith ....

With this view I wrote 'The Ancient Mariner' and was preparing among other poems, 'The Dark Ladie,' and the 'Christabel,' in which I should have more nearly realised my ideal, than I had done in my first attempt.''

—*Biographia Literaria*, ed. by Shawcross, Vol. II, pp. 5-6.

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